TRANS-STYX
and other
STRAINS

·I·N·PHIPPS·

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TRANS-STYX AND OTHER STRAINS

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BY

I. N. PHIPPS

AUTHOR OF

The Lay of the Wraith and Other Poems

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PREFACE

It has occurred to the author of this little volume of verse (he is scarcely conceited enough to believe it deserving of the more dignified title of "poetry") that it might be well, perhaps, to preface it with something like an explanation by way of fortifying himself against any possible adverse criticism touching the string of epigrams submitted under the name of "Tetrastichs." For his attempt to imitate the poetic stride and rhythmic motion of that inimitable Persian (especially in the serious vein so patent as to admit of no denial, even were he a mind to attempt an imposition on his conscience by essaying to take refuge in the claim that only a parody was intended on that famous string of brilliant gems, the ample and beautiful translation of which into English the poetic genius of Fitzgerald made possible) is apt to awake and set going the pen of those unable to see beneath the surface, or read between the lines, the cry of a lack, on his part, of that to which he certainly lays no claim—originality. For, as elsewhere clearly shown, he denies that there is any such thing as originality possible to the modern "knight of the quill."

As previously intimated, in "Tetrastichs" no parody is intended. On the contrary, let it be known that to this writer, at least, the many parodies on Khayyam partake more of the nature of sacrilege than of legitimate humor, seeing his was evidently the quest of an honest heart after Truth, whose evident failure to find "any Providence but Destiny, and any world but this,"

gives to his vain hope a pathetic coloring that merges into the tragic, and therefore anything perpetrated in jest at his expense sounds uncanny, to say the very least of it.

"But," some may say, "the 'Truth' was abroad and far advanced even while he was searching for it, and why did he not avail himself of it, instead of groping his way to the very end?" True, quite true, but at that time showing but dimly in that far away, somewhat isolated corner of the Orient, up and down whose narrow confines he came and went, busying himself with the problems of futurity, which beset and harassed his mind to the exclusion of all else, it would seem, but the exhilarating juice of the grape, which he so persistently panegyrizes, for the reason that from it appears to have come to him the only relief from those hopeless yearnings which kept him forever on the rack of doubt and uncertainty. Yea, showing but dimly, as we have said, and rendered yet less distinct by reason of the one and seventy other and misleading religions, or "lights," bobbing up and down here and there, ignis-fatuus like, in the all-pervading gloom in which he found himself groping, with scant, or no hope, evidently realizing that through neither of those religions with which he was most familiar, was there a way leading to ultimate peace and quiet for his soul.

Is it any wonder then, that he, a philosopher in the broadest sense (even though he caught an occasional glimpse of the one and only "True Light" amidst the many others), did not turn and follow it with that simple faith which is the key to its precious secrets, and all these lead to? The religion of our Lord, as we all know, is one more particularly adapted to the humble and simple hearted, as a rule, than to the arrogant and

philosophically endowed—especially in that day, ere the full effulgence of its glory had burst upon the world.

Were not ninety and nine out of every hundred of its first converts from that class whose erudition did not extend beyond the mending and casting of nets, treading the wine press, or sitting at the receipt of customs? Aside from Saul of Tarsus (who, notwithstanding all he had seen and heard of this religion, was converted to it only by means of a miracle), scarcely one of great learning could be numbered with the early followers of Christ. At least not until the persistent preaching and teaching of this same miracle-made convert had thoroughly impressed the glories of Christianity upon all within the scope of his mission, the sage and scholar with the rest.

My reasons for submitting "Tetrastichs?" Well, first of all I consider this particular form of verse one of greater compass than any to be had, and therefore better adapted to epigrammatical productions, to say nothing of its beautiful construction, which makes "the second and the fourth lines rhyme with the first, while the penultimate is a blank, usually ending in a word of but one syllable, and seems to play the part of a slight obstruction to the rhythmical flow of the little current of thought up to this point, coming to which it appears to rise gracefully, curve over and glide down onto the final line, giving it a pleasant, rhythmical ending not to be found, we believe, in any other form of verse."

Again: It has ever been a matter of wonder to me why one of Khayyam's deep and extensive learning did not include in his contribution to posterity bits of the folk lore of his own and adjacent countries, embracing some of those innumerable legends and myths which constitute the only available history of "humanity's

childhood," with many, if not most of which he must have been familiar, and it occurred to me to avail myself of the opportunity which he and others seem to have neglected, and hence I have taken the liberty of making his style of verse the vehicle for sending out a few epigrams embracing some of those old myths still trailing along in the wake of the centuries.

For the other efforts at verse found between these covers I have no excuses to offer, nor explanations to make. If they do not of themselves reveal the purpose of their being, let them at once sink into that oblivion which a lack of merit and valid reasons for existence make inevitable.

And yet, notwithstanding this play at indifference concerning the fate awaiting the puny offspring of my brain, what man with the feelings of paternity upon him could send the frail, untried little ones of his mental efforts forth to take their chances with the vigorous, able-bodied progeny of the master spirits of Poesy, without some sense of solicitude, and feelings of commiseration for the possible fate in store for them, and hesitate to beg for them other than an inclement reception?

Therefore, inasmuch as they are too fragile, weak, and thinly clad to withstand the rigors of an over-cold reception, and too timid to endure a too acrimonious and quizzical scrutiny, please look upon them kindly, and, if possible to overcome the aversion their only too apparent indigence may induce, take some of the frailer ones to your hearts for a little season at least, remembering meanwhile with some degree of compassion, if you can, the misguided author of their being.

I. N. P.

TRANS-STYX AND OTHER POEMS

THE TRANCE

With nothing but a musty tome,—
An oft-told tale of Greece and Rome,—
A pencil, tablet, and the thought
I'd seek a cool, secluded spot,
I left the village by the way
That led to where the woodlands lay.

The path lay through a meadowland;
Before, behind—on ev'ry hand—
The grasses waved their fuzzy plumes
Above the nodding daisy blooms;
While here and there, above them all,
Grew snowy-tufted elders, tall.

The distant landscape softly shone
Through sunlit haze of azure tone,
And fitful sounds crept to the ear,
Like those in dreams we sometimes hear.

Beyond the mead I crossed a stream
Upon a slender Cypress beam,
Then on, and on, yet nearer to
The silent woods my footsteps drew:
Toward that cool, inviting wood—
The Muse's welcome solitude.

At length a hill-environed glade
Offered the silence and the shade
My eager mind and body sought:
The one for rest, the other thought;
And here, upon a bed of moss,
With restful sighs, at ease, I toss.

What soothing draughts kind Nature brews,
Yet, oh, how often we abuse
The hospitality that she
Dispenses without stint, or fee—
Consuming with the glutton's greed,
Nor rend'ring back to her the meed
Of thanks the guest his hostess owes,
As from her bounteous board he goes!

Face to the earth, the book outspread
Beneath my eyes, I laid and read
The tale of the great Cæsar's death;
And, when his murd'rers struck, my breath
Seemed caught from me, and ere I knew
Another scene broke on my view.

No longer on the earth I lay,
But drifted on a cloud, away
Toward a moon-illumined vale,
Through which a river, phosphor-pale,
And one lone boatman on its tide,
Showed with a sinuous sweep to glide.

Death-gray-green willows fringed each shore,
And I could hear the boatman's oar,
And see the phosphor as it dripped
From the oar blades, as forth they slipped
From the pale waters which they cleaved,
As low the boatman bent and heaved.

Descending slowly, here, the cloud
Touched on the shore, and formed a shroud
Which clasped my shiv'ring soul around,
Much like a winding sheet is wound.

"Unless my fancy plays me tricks,
This is," I said, "the River Styx.
His name who plies the oars— But then,
What boots his name to mortal men?"

Oh, the weird murmur of that stream,
On which the death-green moonbeams gleam
With that unearthly, awesome sheen
Which ye, doubtless, have sometimes seen
A pent-up storm cloud cast before
White lightning it a-pieces tore!

Strange, oh, so strange was that moonlight!
Unlike the moonlight of Earth's night,
What was not near, it made appear
As if it were indeed quite near.

For I had deemed the boatman nigh—
Conceived I saw his baleful eye,
The while it took him long to reach
And bring his boat's prow on the beach,
Where I, a trembling shade, yet stand,
Till he leans forth and takes my hand,
And draws me in, and takes the oar
And rows toward the other shore.

The boatman's hands, methinks, were cold;
His form was bent, and he was old.
Doubtless a million years he'd spent
Above the oars where now he bent.

He was so shrivelled, gray, and grim,
I could not keep my eyes from him,
The while he droned a medley strange
That caught all ages in its range.

Not till my feet had touched the shore
Did I perceive the myriads more
Who, like myself, had lived and died
On Earth, and crossed the Stygian tide.

Countless as the sand grains thrown
By the waves on beaches strown,
Were those grim, diaphanous shades
Swarming through all those Stygian glades.

Think of a substance walking round,
Casting no shadow on the ground!
Though shades in plenty, not a shade
By any substance there was made!

No bubbling springs or fountains clear
Were there apparent anywhere,
Nor ever dew, or mist, or rain,
So far as one could ascertain.
Yet these were 'n nowise desert lands,—
Their mold was moist, and their sands
Were scooped and sucked by those accursed
With ever raging, burning thirst.

That some did thirst and others not
Gave me at once a theme for thought,
Wherefore I asked the reason why
Of other souls convenient by,
And this is how they answered me:
"Some sought the Living draught, you see,
Like she a-fore at Jacob's well,
And have no thirst to quench, or quell.

"At death begins the punishment
Of whom in life their moments spent
In riot-living, heedless of
The voice of conscience, or of love.
Hence, these are they who weep and wail
The torments the like sins entail."

Ah, when you come to enter there,
Then will you know what 'tis to fare
In bournless realms, where countless shades
Forlornly roam shadowless glades!
For e'en the trees, pellucid, too,
Allow the moonbeams to pass through!

'Twas easy to distinguish those
Whose conscience caused them endless woes,
And all as easy to discern
In whom abode the hope etern.

No social cordons there were drawn;
None felt to sneer, or wished to fawn.
The pauper cronied with the prince,
Nor did the princess matters mince
In chumming with the peasant maid,
While countesses with Cyprians strayed.

Judging, the hopeful sympathized
With whom their sins had ostracized,
Nor the forlorn seemed envious those
The straight and narrow way had chose.

The greater intellects held speech,
Though less with others than with each,
And I, in time, came to frequent
Their councils to hear argument—
For even humble souls, like I,
Were nof forbidden to draw nigh.

Some that had won immortal fame
(I need not here inscribe each name)
I came to know; and once it chanced,
As I stood list'ning, quite entranced,
At bits of repartee 'twixt Scott,
Shakespeare, and Byron, that the thought
Came over me that I would try
To mingle more with these, as by
Closer association it
Was possible to gain a bit
Of information I had sought,
By ev'ry channel known to thought,
Anent the latter twain, whose rhymes
Have been the pride of modern times.

With this in mind I quickly threw
Aside my diffidence, and drew
Into their midst, and hit for hit
I gave and took the current wit;

For they were often fain to jest,
And I, though hitherto oppressed
With timidness, was no less fain,
Since thereby might accrue a gain.

'Twas thus we often met, but I
Grew less and less inclined to try
My wit 'gainst theirs, for illy fared
Whoso his wit against theirs dared.

'Twas thus, I say, we met and passed
Much pleasant time; but when at last
Came not the secret I had thought
Such intercourse might bring, I sought
By direct means to gain my end.

And so, deciding thus, I wend
My way toward the rendezvous,
Whereto a welcome well I knew
Awaited me. Arrived, I found
Others there with them, on the ground,
Amongst them one Khayyam, whose verse
I'd much admired for its keen, terse
Satire and wit; and when we met,
As soon we did (for here they set
Much store, mind you, by etiquette,
And those little amenities
The gentle-bred, in life, with ease
And grace of manner, ever heed),
The Persian said he was indeed
Pleased to meet one of whom he'd heard
His friends once say a gracious word.

Whereat I thanked him, and expressed
My admiration in the best
Way I knew how for the quatrains
Fitzgerald's pen, and Vedder's strains
Made possible for lesser ones
To glimpse the beauty through them runs.

'Twere tedious to try to name
The others there, of lasting fame,
Nor shall we so, since we're concerned
Alone with those whose names we've learned.

When came a lull, and I'd acquired
Sufficient courage, I desired
An audience with Scott, and he
Accorded it quite graciously.

Then when alone, and no one near,
I asked him if he thought Shakespeare,
Should I request it, would tell how
His writings all he did endow
With that unique aptness of speech
The like of which none else can reach;
And Byron if, as some insist,
He was, on earth, an atheist.

Also his own (Scott's) views on things:
Whether the modern poet sings
In measures he himself approves
(Ye know how smoothly his own moves),
And if not, then would he comply
With my request, and certify
His chief objection to the ways
These so-called poets sing their lays.

Whereon he answered me that he
Was sure the twain would pleasure me.
Since they had nothing, now, to lose,
How could they reasonably refuse?

As for himself, he said he, too,
Would do the little he could do
To gratify my seeming whim,
Whereon I ended, thanking him.

Returning to the rendezvous,
We found still ling'ring there the two—
Shakespeare and Byron—and one more:
The Persian mentioned once before.

Finding them thus so near alone,
I lost no time in making known
My ardent wish, and hoped that they
Were not inclined to say me nay.

"I spurn the thought—none ever heard,
Methinks, petition more absurd!
A gift that nothing worth conveys,
Recipient nor giver pays,"
Said Byron, and his earnest air
Made seem my wish should illy fare.
"Fidelity to Truth was what
They of my time condemned, and not
The lack of it, since they'd have had
Me show the good, and not the bad—
Whereas the strictures of my art
Require I should conceal no part."

But Shakespeare took the other view:
"If satisfaction should accrue
From being wiser for the truth,
I think that we should grant, forsooth,
The little asked, and more, if need;
A favor wrought is friendship's meed.
As for myself, I shall comply
With his request, as thereby I
Shall be enabled to refute
The fools who would my rights dispute."

"Suppose that I should acquiesce,
And grant the favor thou dost press,"
Quoth Byron, "thou wert none the less
A pauper in the realm of thought
For gaining that from me you've sought,

Since thou couldst not now utilize
What were on Earth, I grant, a prize,
And would go far to gild thy name
And add a luster to thy fame—
But not in Stygian realms would it
Add to thy glory one wee bit."

Here thought succeeded for a space,
And silence reigned in speech's place,
The while the mind of Byron wrought
On whether he should grant or not
The contribution asked; and when
At length he spoke, he said: "But then,
Since you desire it, be it so,
Provided I may likewise show
The light esteem in which I hold
The preacher who regards his fold
As but a means to worldly gain,
Because less pious, far, than vain."

To this provision I could see
No reason I should not agree,
Except, perhaps, it were the just
Might suffer with the false, whose lust
For gain well justified the scath
Which they might suffer through his wrath,
And therefore the contingent harm
Towards the just should not alarm
My conscience, or abate my zeal
To ascertain what were his real
Sentiments and thoughts anent
Future rewards and punishment;
For in whom such like thoughts exist
Rarely is found an atheist.

And wheresoever doubt is found
Is left a bit of fallow ground
Reason has failed to sterilize,
And conscience may yet fertilize.

Wherefore I waived contingencies,
And readily agreed, as these
Succeeding stanzas I transcribe
(For you and others to imbibe,
Or not, accordingly as you
Favor deceit, and truth eschew)
Give evidence to those who know
His cens'rous style and caustic flow.

SALVO PUDORE

BY

THE SHADE OF BYRON

'Tis claimed, you know, and some assert with cause,
  Filthy lucre underlies all evil
(The proverb's not so phrased—poetic laws
  Warrant this phrasing, if not the civil),
A saying trite, but dull, and ever was,
  Howe'er much it may incense the Devil,
A supposition which I question much,
Feeling he pays but scanty heed to such.

For knowing, as he does, who quotes it best,
  Is he who least of all observes its pith,
And that an adage oft become a jest
  When it too frequently is dallied with,
And therefore loses all its force and zest;
  He looks on it as you do on a myth,
Or hoary tale, wherewith you would coerce
Your children to be good, or less perverse.

Now much about my poems has been said,
  Some lauding them, where censure was more due;
Some judging—not because that which they read
  Was unchaste, so much as because 'twas true,
And which, therefore, straight to the conscience sped,
  And like the old, much-worn, proverbial shoe,
Fitted so well it needs, of course, must pinch,
And, pinching them, how else could they but wince?

Nor have the sins and follies which I then
  Held up to ridicule and righteous scorn
Abated in the least—women and men
  (Still to lust and lecherous passions born)
Pursue each other now, as they did when
  Young Juan was by Donna Julia shorn
Of that which in monastic day a vow
Ascetics made, and some few practice now.

I'm not the moralist you'd care to quote,
  Judging from criticisms of my work,
Nor my religious tenets, when I wrote
  Of current things, so strict as some who perk
And preen before fashionable flocks. Note
  The vanity of some you know, who'd irk
Satan himself! Yet, since you crave my views,
I'll show how worldly pulpits make godless pews.

From moral apathy and placitude
  Comes the great increase in ev'ry vice known.
For the teachings of Christ, where understood,
  There's little respect or reverence shown.
The Pulpit, it seems, is deeply imbued
  With philosophy, which of late has grown
Till, in the arrogance of reason, they
Are seeking, 'twould seem, an easier way

To Heaven than Christ to His own made plain
  When He taught humility, and contempt
For worldly wants and material gain,
  And the blessedness of being exempt
From lust, hate, doubt, hypocrisy and vain
  Things. In short—the need to fully pre-empt,
Or crush and destroy ev'ry evil germ,
If one his faith in His blood would affirm.

Medieval piety, I aver,
  Virtues enjoined of a goodlier kind
Than to-day in Christendom anywhere
  You'll find prescribed, to the best of my mind.
Ascetic, the monk was perforce austere,
  Rugged, invective, and rarely refined.
Not yet he'd learned that justification
Came alone by faith unto salvation.

Protestants sneer at Catholicity,
  And I myself hoot the arrogant claim
Of the Pope to infallibility;
  Yet I am persuaded, indeed, the same
Proscribes things Protestant morality
  Countenances with quite unblushing shame.
Even detested Buddhism, I'm quite sure,
Leads them in restraints that maketh more pure.

There are too many weaklings who aspire
  To pulpits, or a shepherd's crook to wield;
Who lack the inspiration and the fire
  To reach the heart and conscience, like Whitfield,
Bernard, Jerome, Chrysostom, or the Prior
  Of St. Mark,—Savonarola,—whose shield
Of righteousness venalities withstood
Till death gave him the marytr's crown of blood.

What think you, sir, I pray, of that man whose
  Vesture stamps him as a preacher of the Word
Who seeks the busy marts of trade, and woos
  Dame Fortune like the common, godless herd?
And, just as they, figures to win, or lose
  (By the self-same passions swayed and stirred)—
Dost wonder that the church's influence wanes,
Or marvel gross materialism reigns?

Many there be, I know, who will disdain
The idea that the charge applies to them.
Would this were so, and thoughts of earthly gain
Were as far from them as that diadem
Which those who fail not of the goal attain.
Only the faithless ones I would condemn—
Those only who would live by bread alone:
The faithful by their godly fruits are known.

Yet there are many righteous, I avow:
Shepherds who know, and of their own are known;
Who, when they at the throne of mercy bow,
Sooner than their neighbor's lot, their own
Forget, and plead as only those know how
Whose hearts teem not with selfish thoughts alone.
Such form the salt its savor loses not,
And live to bless when t'others are forgot.

God knows I love such blessed souls as these,
And not for all Heaven hath wherewith to bless
Would I disparage them, or them displease!
But for whose tender love and kindliness
Far fewer heartsick ones would find surcease
From dread, relentless woe, and sorrow's stress.
Blest be the voice that soothes, the hands that bind
The wounded, grief-pent heart and distraught mind!

Yet, now, a little farther to pursue
The matter, nor by feint or dalliance beat
The beast about the bush in this review,
Let us see if we cannot find the seat
Of trouble—foregoing censure when due,
Applauding merit when applause is meet.
One should be no less fair to foe than friend,
Nor treat the evil harshly he would mend.

I deny that's always success which succeeds.
Take, now, for instance, religious success:
You deem those religions (regardless of creeds)
Successful whose converts are numberless
The while you know 'tis man's ultimate needs
That leads him to embrace religion, stress
Of fear, and dread of punishment for deeds
Done in the flesh, that to confession leads.

Now, if that religion be a vain one,
As all of them must be, you will confess,
Save and excepting that whereof the Son
Of God is head (whose holy name we bless!),
Then that which these deluded ones have done
A failure is, rather than a success,
Since they vainly expect confirmation
Of their hopes of ultimate salvation.

Expediency, the Jesuit's friend,
Too oft, alas! the questionable means
Is made the quicker to attain an end,
However much the conscience intervenes,
Or persistently declines to recommend
That which a subtile evil surely screens;
And unto it's apparent quite, if not,
Likewise, to him the end alone has sought.

How many preachers expediency use
To attain an end they live to deplore!
I refer to those alone who abuse
Their sacred calling, as opined before.
Some resort to wit, only to amuse,
And some of them you with new ideas bore,
While some to sensational things resort,
And some get mixed up in Scandal's report.

Likewise one, for the sake of converts,
  Conforms his sermons to the heart's gross trend,
Not heeding 'tis thus that Satan perverts
  Christianity to his own base end.
For if one only seemingly deserts
  His former ways, why should he not lend
His name to the church's roll if thereby he
May swell the preacher's popularity?—

Which is all that some of these worldings seek,
  I am sorry to say, upon my word,
And who with scarcely less lechery reek
  Than the basest roue by the virtuous feared.
If I, aware of these things, failed to speak
  As becometh one who by such is stirred,
I'd hate myself no less than I hate those
Whose insincerity I would fain expose.

I'd started a moment ago to say
  (And that I did not, I now thank Heaven!)
Salt without savor's society to-day:
  Meal, with a measure of Satan's leaven.
Yet this were so nearly true, I pray
  That a little grace to me be given—
A little time to make my purpose known,
And cast a dart where few have yet been thrown.

And what is Society, but a curse?
  A "School for Scandal"! a "Vanity Fair"!
Of which the best that can be said is worse
  Than the worst that you can conceive, I swear!
To which it is claimed a plethoric purse
  Blinds the eyes of the few who would not dare
Do the naughty things her votaries do,
A charge, I am sorry, that's somewhat true.

You marvel, doubtless, at their placitude
Whose lives are doomed to incessant toil;
Who for raiment and meager daily food
Their burdens bear, and dig and till the soil,
Content to feel they do less harm than good,
Knowing no cravings for fashion's turmoil,
Or those base pleasures the worlding fain
Would barter his hope of Heaven to gain.

The only way to happiness is through
The virtues of the heart, as you will find.
Social frivolities but serve to brew
Some passion that debauches heart and mind,
Stimulating cravings for something new,
Always of that demoralizing kind
Civilization breeds once it has shown
Its back to those excesses it has known.

Mark what I say, nor count it false or vain:
Contentment is the forfeit one must pay
For riches or intellectual gain,
As surely as the night succeeds the day—
Unless the one so favored would the pain
Of some poor, less fortunate heart allay.
The heart, or mind, which on itself relies
For happiness, feeds on itself and dies.

A paradox in life is clearly shown
When wealth denies its favored placitude.
Happiness seems to shun a gilded throne
For that simplicity and quietude
That reigns where Christian faith and love alone
Gives zest to life, and grace and gratitude—
Soul auxiliaries that are never found
Where hate, or greed, or passions base abound.

Oft ignorance with greater luster shines
  Because of graces Christian virtue lends,
Than radiates from those transcendent minds
  The world's perverted to ignoble ends.
The faith the intellectual giant finds
  So simple 'tis obnoxious, depends
For its adherents on the common herd,
Whose simple minds imbibe the simple Word.

'Tis passing strange the so-called great revile,
  As oft as not, primitive Christian faith,
For which those blest ones who looked on the while
  Christ, through his own, removed the sting of death,
Scourgings forewent, torture, death, or exile—
  Extolling Him unto their utmost breath,
Declaring He alone of all could save
Who'd o'ercome Death—the monster—and the Grave.

Much was my Cain condemned, and I impugned,
  Because I dared put in his mouth the words
To which impious souls like his are tuned
  (Wherewith a pious ut'rance ill accords),
As he with crafty Lucifer communed,
  While he to him a glimpse of words affords
Other than Earth, and myst'ries, shapes and such,
Causing him to marvel and to question much.

Should one pervert a work of art, merely to please
  A falsely modest, or a narrow mind?
'Twould never be a work of art, if these
  Found not the fault that such are prone to find.
By all the rules of art the blasphemies,
  For which I've been persistently maligned,
Are perfectly consistent, I maintain,
In spirits such as Lucifer and Cain.

That unrepented crime of his, which sent
Him forth a wanderer upon the earth,
Had seared and scathed, until no sentiment
Except blasphemy in his soul found birth.
Defiant, scornful,—ready to resent
Even God's overtures of peace, the worth
Of prayer eschewing,—how, pray, could I
Put in his mouth other than blasphemy?

Consistently, therefore, I wrote and wrought,
Knowing, meanwhile, that fools would hiss my name,
Impute to me a vicious trend of thought,
And otherwise attempt to cloud my fame:
Wherefore the medium of satire I brought
To bear upon, and put the horde to shame,
Who thenceforth took refuge in that base libel—
That my views were adverse to the Bible!

And though apparent misanthropy ran
As threads of scarlet, through each woof I wove,
This was but part and parcel of a plan
I'd early formed, whereby that I might prove
My contempt for that parasitic clan
That lay in wait for those who 'strode, or strove
To 'stride Pegasus, or follow the Muse,
And eked their bread through libelous reviews.

I doubt not Time will kindly place me on
The pinnacle for which, in life, I pined,
Nor my reception into the Pantheon,
With other like contributors to mind,
Regardless of that cursed Don Juan,
Which insult to sweet womanhood, I find,
Was that which tore the laurel from my brow,
Which, else, had clung unsullied there till now.

Enough of this! Howe'er, I love to feel,
  Or hope, at least, it kindled no desires,
Wrought no evil to connubial weal,
  Added no fuel unto passion's fires,
Whose warmth e'en virtue loves too near to steal
  (Because of those sensations such inspires),
From whence retreat, alas! she oft delays,
While she with the new, sweet sensation plays.

My old Pegasus is as fleet to-day
  As in the times when I bestrode him last,
And fain would take the bit and speed away,
  As oft in that somewhat lamented past;
And, but for these, awaiting here to pay
  A tribute to thy wish—verses to cast
Into thy eager hands—then would I heed
His eagerness, and bid him to his speed.

But as it is, reluctantly I now
  Resign my charger to the Scottish bard,
Whose laurels are as fresh upon his brow
  As when he trode the highlands and the sward
For legends and traditions to endow
  His poems with that flavor, 'tis so hard,
Once you have ever tasted, to forget.
So end I, now, in ending this couplet.

DECADENCE OF POESY

BY

THE SHADE OF SCOTT

'Twas not for fame, or glory's meed,
I sung my songs on Earth, nor greed;
But to reclaim and still prolong
The cadences of feudal song,
The wand'ring minstrel, harping, sung
To knight and lady fair and young,
Did I espouse the Muse, and string
My harp to minstrelsy, and sing.

To ev'ry peasant's song mine ear
I bent, if I perchance might hear
A strain of those expiring rhymes
That thrilled the heart in feudal times,
And made the wand'ring minstrel quite
The peer of any lord or knight.

And often from these peasants came
A strain that lit the Muse's flame,—
A quaver, or a fragment of
A martial lay, or tale of love,—
And hence it was, a transient note
Often inspired the song I wrote.

We here upon the hither shore
Of Styx have marked and much deplore
The tendency in modern verse
To cold rigidity, and worse—
The absence of that sentiment
That to our own a sweetness lent.

The heart where sentiment abides
Holds love and sympathy besides;
The heart where these have no abode
Is doomed to wither, or corrode.
Savor of death, to death the trend
Of that which gladdens not the end!

That is not poetry that fails
To win responsiveness—entails
No tender thought, or hope, or aim
To do a kindly act, and shame
The evil tendencies that we
Inherit with humanity.

In ev'ry heart, or old, or young,
Aeoleon-like harps are strung,
And ever these, or soon, or late,
Responsive to a touch vibrate,
And fortunate the one that sings
The song that wakes the dormant strings.

A benefactor and a friend
Is any mortal who can lend
A meager hope, a transient ray
To light some pilgrim on his way.
How many hearts, though callous grown,
Are softened by a tender tone!

Dost wonder at my scorn for those
Who, by transposing pleasing prose,
Construct a rigid verse they call
A sonnet or a madrigal?
Shame on their flagrant, base abuse
Of the ancient, glorious Muse!

For they have crowded her aside,
And now for Pegasus bestride
A golden calf, to which they bow
Between effusions, and allow
That it an inspiration lends
Sufficient to their sordid ends.

Look through the Classics all and find
Now, if you can, something in kind
Like this new square-and-compass verse
The modern magazines disburse,
In lieu of that with sense and pith
We used to pay our readers with.

Civilization less to prose,
Than it does to poetry, owes
For its languages; and the molds
For thought, and love, and feeling, holds
Each the impress of the Muse
That formed and fashioned them for use.

The poet fashioned ev'ry myth
The ancient was familiar with,
Creating those mythologies
Whence came those low apologies
For Deity, from whom they sought
Indulgences, as Nature taught.

Wherefore, likewise, it chanced, in time,
Heroes and heroines of rhyme
Became the models for the art
That fills a niche in ev'ry heart
The least esthetic'ly endued
With love for sculpture, draped or nude.

'Tis true, the Pantheon of each race
Oft held some hid'ous beast, in place
Of those fair forms the poet's mind
Made to conform to human-kind—
The gods and goddesses that he
Transmitted to posterity.

Dost thou dare say the faultless grace
(Both of his creature's form and face)
With which he fashioned them, in verse,
Inspired not that served to coerce
Man from barbaric ways, and led
Him to a civil state, instead?

Quite true, he had the sculptor's aid,
But who was it the sculptor made?
Find, if you can, some record of
An image, ere a tale of love
Came from the poet's fertile brain,
Then count my boast as false and vain.

His heroines, we know, were lewd
More oft than with chasteness endued:
Heroes licentiously endowed,
And at the shrine of Bacchus bowed;
Yet they an impulse gave to thought,
And thought, in time, for virtue wrought.

Hence, we maintain to poesy
The world's indebted for the free
And boundless knowledge is its meed,
From sciences to simplest creed,
In that it gave the first impulse
To learning, and the nicer cults.

Yet, with this to its credit, now
We find it has become, somehow,
The plaything of those shallow minds
Who in it a medium find
Through which some tale or waggish thought
To the like hearts and minds is brought.

All which but goes to prove, of late
Mind has descended to a state
Of material thoughts and things,
Denying to its fancy wings
To mount on high, and thence explore
The realm of shadows, as of yore.

The mind that haunts the marts of trade
Alone hath rarely e'er essayed
A thought above the lust of gain,
And therefore by the golden chain
Itself hath forged, to Mammon's bound,
And ends with him life's weary round.

Alike by man and Heaven scorned,
Is ev'ry man who has suborned
His conscience with some specious plea
To cease its vigilance, while he
Despoiled and left to shame the fair
And hapless victim of his snare.

Yet he who would despoil the Muse
Of her prerogative, and use
The modern vehicle for thought
The growing lust of gain hath wrought,
As much a subject is for scorn
As he by whom the maid is shorn.

Yet there are some exceptions to
My charge, as there are still a few
Who court the Muse by the same rule
They practiced in my time and school—
Both wit and poet, when they would
Say something trite, sententious, good.

And now the moral laxity,
Peculiar to Society,
I'll tax your patience with, and time,
Bad as I hate to smirch my rhyme,
By making it the instrument
To rend that rose and aureate blent
Scum, which screens the undertow
That bears its victims down to woe.

And it may be somewhere beneath
That noisome scum, this screen of death,
You'll catch a glimpse, a passing gleam
Of something in this hell-bent stream
Which may encourage you to dare
The hope all is not rotten there.

Here the graceful libertine
Hero is, and the heroine
Is the woman who'll advance
The farthest in loose dalliance,
Arousing passions doubtless she
Indulges without stint or fee.

Excessive riches pave the way
To idleness, and this decay
Of ev'ry moral germ, wherein
Abides a counterpoise to sin.
O for a Paula or Jerome
To rear an altar in each home!

The public conscience, callous grown,
Scarcely protests against the known
Evils, which, Briarean-like,
At ev'ry moral safeguard strike.
Better a stern Puritanism
Than a gross materialism!

The certitudes of Heaven alone
Afford the only pleasures known;
Who will upon them may repose,
Scorning alike earth's joys and woes.

Scoff at ascetics, if you will,
Who, through stern penance, sought to kill
The evils that beset the flesh,
And weave about the soul a mesh
Of self-restraint and abstinence,
And thus against the Devil fence.

Rapt in sweet reveries and dreams
Celestial, they caught transient gleams
Of faces wherein radiant shone
The Light reflected from the throne,
Illumining likewise the road
Which leads from earth to Christ and God.

Alas! how few pursue the trail,
How few beside who start and fail,
Discouraged by some trivial thing
That did but prick or lightly sting
A trick the Devil often plays
To lead men into devious ways.

TE JUDICE

BY

THE SHADE OF SHAKESPEARE

Who to original thought lays claim
  Is conscience seared and a deceiver;
Those ancient wits winged all such game,
  And not till I, came a retriever
With aptness and an amplitude
  Of acumen, and wind to range
The fields they'd traversed and bestrewed
  With rarely plumaged thought and strange
But fascinating metaphor:
  Trite and striking similitudes
(Such as the realists abhor),
  And airy little aptitudes,
Which from the unculled fields of thought
  They'd winged and left to lie unseen,
Till I their reclamation wrought,
  And clothed them in perennial green.

No worth had they till we'd descried
  And put them to poetic use.
The pronoun "we" includes, beside
  My humble self, my gracious Muse.

Some yet wore the swaddling-bands
  Their nameless sires had wound them in,
Foundlings and waifs from divers lands,
  Bereft of living kith or kin.

Some in embryo were indeed,
A crude, half semblance of the thought
They'd have begotten, you'd agreed,
If you had seen them ere I'd wrought
With them, and 'rayed them in a weave
Made from the threads my fancy spun,
Which you, sir, may or not believe
Were rav'lings taken, ev'ry one,
From sayings old—thread-bare with age—
Which in the dawn of Time were young:
Decrepid waifs, some ancient sage
To his untutored friends had sung.

One scarce can over-amplify
The great antiquity of most
The proverbs each posterity
Of each succeeding age has tossed,
Each to the other, lip to ear,
In serious or playful vein,
On obelisk, or parchment clear,
By hieroglyph, or liquid stain.

All which, I claim, but goes to show
Nothing is new beneath the sun.
Old as the ocean's ebb and flow;
Old as the day when Time begun;
Old as the first gray mist that hung
Above the first outgoing wave;
The song the Morning Stars first sung,
The blood that cried from Abel's grave;
Older than God's Covenant, far,
The rainbow which the heavens spans;
Coeval with the first-born star,
Is each and ev'ry thought of Man's.

Moderns, I grant you, have evolved
From Nature's subtile elements
What Ancients had in no whit solved,
So far as we have evidence.
Yet who dares say their minds held not
Shadows of things now manifest?
May not heredity have wrought
The evolutions here expressed?

Who letteth unobstructed flow
The spirit of the times, at length
About his mind's abode will show
The fullest growth, the greatest strength.

Man's way across the ages lies,
O'ercast with shadows, flecked with light,
And somewhere in the way he dies,
And friends remove his corpse from sight.
And those whose welfare is his aim,
And those who journey by his side,
Alike forget him, and his name
Is lost in Time's remorseless tide.
Age after age has gone the way
His face is set, and he must needs
Find something meet to do and say
Along the line his dest'ny leads—
Must build a Babel, or remove
A mountain that obstructs his view;
Delve in the earth for treasure-trove,
Or whatso'er he finds to do.

No creature of his handicraft
Is he, the creature, able to
Endue with life and skill to draft
A semblance, as himself can do.

What does the sculptor with the stone,
  But chisel a similitude?
What has the artist, when 'tis done—
  A real, or an imaged wood?
The brick wherewith the mason builds,
  The mortar that he spreads between;
The gilt wherewith the gilder gilds,
  The colors in the prism seen,
All, all from Nature taken were,
  And fashioned to the needs of man—
Her crude materials ev'rywhere
  The artist waits, and artisan.

So, as the sculptor gets his stone
  From Nature, and his model, too,
The artist thence likewise the tone
  Wherewith his pictures to imbue;
The mason in her clays and sands
  And carbonates the needful finds,
And ready to the gilder's hands
  The precious metal from her mines.

The poet thence likewise repairs
  For trite and telling similes,
For sentiment and tender airs,
  And metaphor, and harmonies.
Maybe a thousand times or so,
  From other lips, from other eyes,
The same have caused to play or flow
  The smile he wakes, the tear he dries.

Hence, from the greatest to the least,
  We are but copyists at best;
The visual, or mental feast
  We toast each other through with zest,

Others partook of in the days
When Man was few, and Earth was young,
Though it may be our modern lays
More rhythmic are than those they sung.

Wherefore my legacy to mind
Was not original, you see,
And whoso claims new thoughts, you'll find,
Is playing your credulity.

The poet far less prestige owes
Original than range of thought;
The fountain which to fullness flows
Is ever the most prized and sought.
Likewise, he to tradition owes
More for the glory he acquires,
Than to the written page, which glows
With facts and romance of empires,
Because a fable it supplies
Wherewith the other can't compare,
And gives his fancy rein to rise,
And fare where it is wont to fare.

The time was when men's wit was not
So hedged about as 'tis to-day;
Who first secured the brilliant thought
A careless wit dropped by the way
Might such appropriate and use,
Without the consequence of shame,
Or fear the critic would refuse
The meed of praise that gilds a name.

The wit of ev'ry wit of them
Was his who had the greater mind—
Knew best the sparkle of the gem
By chance or fortune he should find.

Illit'rate times a harvest yields
Of sentiment and homely wit.
The untaught swain most deeply feels,
And, voicing love, he pictures it.

'Tis in such times the great appear
Greater, methinks, than is their meed;
Absorbing ev'rything that's near,
With others' wit their own they feed.

Even the foolish sometimes say
A witty thing, not knowing it,
And he who will may take and pay
It out as coin of his own wit.

No classic known, or prose, or rhyme,
Had birth and being in one mind;
The best of all preceding time
Were in this Ultimate combined.

As one, a thousand minds had wrought
To crown a single one with fame!
Through centuries these gems of thought
To him, all cut and fashioned, came.

Even the sov'reign form of prayers
(I shame not Him in saying it),
Ere Christ gave it the form it wears,
Had served the Rabbis bit by bit.

To Him all praise and glory be
For plucking from the dross and silt
The golden words that framed the plea,
Uttered in faith, preserves from guilt!

Scarcely a classic, prose or rhyme,
But had its origin in Myth;
The heritage of farthest time
Is all you are familiar with.

From India's stores of myth the tale
Of good King Lear, by devious ways,
Crept slowly to our times, and—stale
With age—the Venice Merchant plays
For us the very roles he played
(With Portia, pound of flesh, and ring)
For those the Macedonian made
Acknowledge him their sovereign king.

And Peeping Tom of Coventry
In India peeped ages before
Godiva knew his lech'rous eye
Had sought the key-hole of her door.

And Johnny Sands could trace his source
To Nineveh or Babylon;
A child of Myth, he came in course
Of time to strut our stages on.

Whence came the art of ancient Greece,
The sculpture all posterity
Admires no less with Time's increase?
For answer—Egypt's temples see,
The rude relief the architect
Designed for ornament and show,
On temple walls, I half suspect
Led by degrees to sculptor. So,
Likewise, the minstrel for the strain
That wakes a sigh, or starts a tear,
Owes some winged warbler whose refrain
Has caught and held his raptured ear.

Boccacio garbled all he wrote,
And from Boccacio much I drew.
Scarce one truism people quote
To its reputed source is due.

Not what he fashions, or designs,
The genius makes, but knowing how
To utilize the waste he finds,
That hangs the laurel on his brow.

In each succeeding age appears,
Above the horizon of thought,
Some intellect the coming years
Will crown for something said, or wrought.

'Twas Wisdom gave us not to see,
In youth, the rainbow nimbus hung
About our heads, and, seemingly,
Our future paths with garlands hung—

Else had we clung to mother-skirts,
Or hid beneath paternal boughs,
Reluctant to endure the hurts
Which life inflicts while it endows.

One kindly deed, in mercy wrought,
Will sink a thousand wrongs from sight—
One look of pity oft hath brought
To hopeless souls a ray of light.

"TETRASTICHS"

BY

THE SHADE OF KHAYYAM

The thoughts and fancies which I here append
For your acceptance or rejection, friend,
  Are merely transcripts from some scores I wrote
Ere the grim Ferrash came and wrought my end.

One's mere witticisms, flung in jest at Fate,
Or morbid tendency to speculate
  Anent the mystery of Life and Death,
The broad, impartial mind will tolerate.

"What most imports a mortal man to win,
And whither on life's way should he begin?"
  One asked of me, and I, scarce knowing, said,
"Some soul, methinks, to righteousness from sin."

He answered me, "What profits that the man
Whose soul itself is under heavy ban?
  Whoso starts not his charity at home,
The reach from earth to heaven scarce shall span."

One, seeking, asked me, "What is Death?" I said
(How quake some at a very shadow's tread!)—
  Well, what I answered him—concerns it you?
First answer me the number of thy dead!

Not knowing at whose bier ended the line
Of consanguinity, couldst reckon thine?
The source of kinship lies too far away
For me to trace and count the dead of mine!

And as the sea-shell still echoes the strain
Sung in the caverns of its native main,—
However far remote,—so chants the soul
The songs of its lost Ed'n, and sighs in vain.

Yet howsoe'er I strive to fright away
The phantoms that beset me, and be gay,
Dread of Futurity doth ever taint
The flavor of the pleasures due to-day.

Ah, soul of mine! 'tis folly to deny
Thy craven fear, and all as vain to try,
E'en lip to lip with this sweet second spouse,
The Prophet's lurid warning to defy!

Now it may be the snare for her was set
To prove the Woman's proneness to forget,
And change a blessing for a doubtful whim,
That into the void left might come regret.

For until he—the snake—appeared, no sting
Had found her heart, or other hurtful thing,
To turn her thoughts within, and make her feel
That need of pardon which remorse doth bring.

Not knowing it shall find, through death, the rest
Which proves in life a weary, hopeless quest,
Marvel not thou the soul oft shrinks, appalled,
And life is robbed of all its charm and zest.

And still the knot of human fate resists
The efforts of the curious, and twists
  The mind whoso would unravel it,
Till fain to quit the tangle, he desists.

"And what is Life?" another questioned me;
"Drag thou aside the veil that I may see."
  I turned, and pointing to an open grave:
"Behold," I whispered him, "Life's mystery."

Wherefore, O man, dost thou so blanch and start?
What is it knocks for answer at thy heart?
  "My soul," he said, "would know the whence and
      where,
No whit of which I'm able to impart."

Canst thou no single grain of comfort lend
Thy wistful soul, so near its mortal end?
  Thy plight scarce balances the just deserts
Of one who would debauch so close a friend!

"Thou fool!" he answered me, "I am my soul's,
And howsoever it will it me controls;
If evil, what? if good, where is my gain?
Am I aught other than the grave enfolds?"

"But it is bruited thou some day shalt rise,
And stand before the Bar of the Allwise,
  Who will thy everlasting place declare
According as thy Earth-life justifies."

Then answered he with speech more temperate,
"I know, indeed, before His throne shall wait
  Alike the quick and dead their weal or woe;
But is such mine, or only my soul's fate?"

Such mystery pervades the written Word,
Had I dared answer him perhaps I'd erred,
And witlessly false hopes or fears aroused
In one who seemed already deeply stirred.

I passed an open portal, whence one cried,
"Ho! all who will may here the night abide;
The Bride awaits thee, and the Groom says come—
Then why dost linger on the outerside?"

But, heeding not, I passed the portal by,
Yet whereso'ere I went, heard I the cry,
Till on a day the Voice its pleadings ceased,
And now, alas, I know the reason why!

Well, I am sorry; and if again I hear
Those loving accents dinning in my ear,
And find the Portal whence the Voice came,
Then will I heed and enter, have no fear!

The soul itself is its own witness, friend,
And for refuge and succor needs depend
On nothing other than its conscious self;
Then why, O fool! thy conscious soul offend?

As Water doth the Body cleanse, so Mind
By Truth is purified, Menu opined;
Well, howsoever this may be, we know
We're less to good than evil thoughts inclined.

If Eblis would not yield obedience when
Commanded to show Adam homage, then
Blame not Almighty that He cast him forth,
Where, out of spite, he "lies in wait for men."

From Al Araf, we're taught, an open view
Is had of Paradise, and Hades, too;
  Unfit for Heav'n, nor yet deserving hell,
Are those adjudged to fare between the two!

Then, destined not of Paradise to be,
Grant me a place upon Al Araf, free
  To badger those who, knowing, missed the way
They were too self-engrossed to show to me!

'Tis not so much the sting of death we dread,
Nor yet the grave, where Love's last farewell's said,
  As that sheer plunge into the vast Unknown
The soul must take on new found pinions sped.

Presumptuous Earth! albeit you foresaw
The creature God designed should break His law,
  How dared you seek to have him change His will,
And from His little scheme of Man withdraw?

Let's see: Robbed of its doctrine that the soul
Exists beyond the portals of Life's goal,
  What's thy religion left, you should deny
Your senses leave to play their wonted role?

Foredoomed To-morrow on the self-same stroke
To-day, forespent, will have his farewell spoke,
  With gladsome step will start toward that past
On which no sound but sighs has ever broke.

And some of us who shall with laughter greet
Him where the past and where the future meet,
  Ourselves must slip the shackles, and go hence
Ere he his little circle shall complete.

Think not thy Sharak can the question solve;
On thee the consequences all devolve;
  Take courage from thy conscience, and thou wouldst
Unhorse Old Doubt, flaunting a just resolve!

I cast a sonnet to a gaping crowd,
And their acclaim was earnest as 'twas loud,
  Till one arose and threw a madrigal,
When, as one man, they to this idol bowed!

And with the Avesta the Bactr'an Seer
Gave him for guidance, need the Parsee fear?
  But mark! the sacred fire the sunbeam lit
Must never be allowed to disappear!

Both Armazda and Ahriman were great,
And each upon his throne of power sate,
  And the equal homage of the Magi took
Who would no chances on the Ultimate!

Sunrise of man a lengthened shadow throws,
At noon it hath crept back about his toes;
  So mind in youth leaps forth in its conceit,
But later finds how little then it knows.

From the two cups which we together clink,
O friend of mine, the lees of life we drink!
  The bitter and the sweet together swirl
As to our lips we turn them, whence they sink!

There is a music which attaints the ear;
There is a laughter that echoes a fear;
  There is a joy that forecasts a woe,
And ev'ry eye distills a limpid tear!

Sighs will not alter, nor regret erase
A single memory we would efface;
Though warm and plastic, yet the tablet holds
The impress of each act on it we trace.

Not whence we came, so much as where we go
Is it that most imports a man to know,
If it be true the lesser and the great
Alike shall reap and garner as they sow.

Well, what my harvest is to be, I needs
Must wait the germination of the seeds,
Then cast—but will I be allowed to cast
The balance 'twixt my good and evil deeds?

Now, if she did indeed the Jew invoke,
And from his shoulders snatched away his cloak
As from the am'rous one he turned and fled,
Which commandment was it Zulieka broke?

And then when Bahram Gur and his fair seven
Are called before the bar of all in heaven,
Think of the witnesses against the man,
And of their chances there of getting even!

And Sohrab dies! But while his life blood flows,
He the amulet to doubting Rustum shows.
Well, had they heeded Ruksh's wild, weird neigh,
Mayhap it had not then so happ'd, who knows!

And if Al Sirat is no wider than
A spider's thread, then fear, indeed, the span!
The reach from Earth to Heaven, over hell,
Makes it unsafe for even a just man!

There is a story of a fratricide,
There is a tale about the Blood that cried
  Up from the ground unto its Maker, and
A mark none—that I've read of—e'er descried.

Then answered one and said, "I've heard it told
Adam sent Seth, when he had waxen old,
  To seek the cherub guarding Eden's gate
And beg a Balsam from his lost freehold."

"Nonsense!" said one, "for Adam was too wise
To deem his son could find lost Paradise,
  No glimpse of which hath ever yet been had
To gladden any other mortal's eyes."

Then quoth the other, "Softly, softly, friend,
And hear the legend to the utter end:
  Adam showed Seth his feet had scorched a trail,
And warned him on these footprints to depend."

"Got he the Balsam?" asked one I knew not.
"No," quoth the other, "but instead he got
  A seed that he should plant in Adam's mouth,
At his decease, along with him to rot.

" 'Four thousand years must pass,' the cherub said,
Ere opes the gate through which the twain were led.
  Tell them the Serpent's touch hath scathed the tree,
And, save the root and tip, the tree is dead.

" 'Twas from that tree thy parents plucked and ate;
From it this seed their dust shall propagate,
  And grow the wood whereon shall come to pass
That shall restore them to their lost estate!

"The tree waxed strong and mighty, girth and height,
And Solomon, requiring one of might
For the chief pillar to support his roof,
Had it felled, and scored and fashioned right.

"But when they stood the pillar in its place
It was too short by ever such a space,
Wherefore they built a pedestal for it,
And then it pierced the roof and marred its grace.

"At this the King, becoming wroth at last,
Ordered the beam across the Cedron cast;
An end of it on either bank was placed
To form a bridge for whoso daily passed.

"From thence 'twas moved and buried in the glade
Where, later on, the famous pool was made
To whose clear waters it imparted that
Which healed the ailing who in it were laid.

"About the time He was betrayed and tried
The beam rose to the surface of the tide,
And so was used to make the cross, 'tis said,
On which the Christ was raised and crucified."

"A likely tale," said one, decrepit, gray;
"A fair invention, though, I'm bound to say.
But if his feet had left a blackened trail,
How was it others never found the way?"

Now was it just to the Scape-goat to lay
The sins of wicked Israel on him, pray?
Better its fate whose death their sins atoned
Than his who bore them to the wilds away!

Man stalks the world with vanity replete,
Unmindful that the dust beneath his feet
  Is that to which he owes the form he wears,
And likewise debtor for his vain conceit.

I've heard a tale where one Jan Ibin Jan
Is made to seem a pre-Adamic man,
  Building and ruling over Chilminar
Long ere the days when Adam's reign began!

'Tis well, perhaps, between the mind of man
And that we call the Infinite Plan
  Suspends a veil we cannot penetrate
Till we have rounded out life's little span.

Tread where we will, we press a human heart
Or that which was of man a mortal part.
  The air we breathe, others, expiring, left
When the grim archer winged them with his dart.

Life's insufficient glimpses but reveal
How greatly less we know than what we feel.
  Not his excessive and utter conceit
Can from man's soul his littleness conceal.

'Twixt the Avesta and the Koran how
Are we to know to whom, indeed, to bow?
  Well, nothing better, let us still pursue
The beaten path and make the most of now.

And when we've had our round of mirth and wine
And slipped the shackles which to-day confine,
  Come thou, O Saki, to my bier and tilt
A flowing beaker to these lips of mine!

If one to harp and one's ordained to burn,
How, then, is fate on our own acts to turn?
  Destined to harp, then why our mirth subdue?
Foredoomed, then vain is all our heart's concern.

The stars that tremble on yon azure plain,
As little know they of what we would fain
  As we know of the Hand that thursts them forth
And draws them back behind the veil again.

Shall we accept the tale and question not?
David, 'tis told, took refuge in a grot
  Where spiders quickly spun a web across,
Deceiving those who, else, within had sought!

I tell you this: a game of chance decides
(Behind the curtain Now and Then divides)
  What is to be my lot, and yours, and yours,
And He that throws the dice is judge besides.

And Man was lulled to sleep, and from his side
God took the rib and fashioned him a bride,
  And this first sleep became the pattern of
That one to'rd which our heedless footsteps glide.

As cried the traitor's blood when Aeneas drew
The Myrtle from his ashes, whence it grew,
  So cried my soul when doubt uprooted quite
The one remaining hope 'twas clinging to.

That was a sorry trick the Devil played
Upon King David when himself he made
  A stag, and lured the royal sportsman on
To where Goliah's kin his death essayed!

Answered the Vine: "But for the Devil's wiles
My juice had nourished only mirth and smiles."
Hist, O Vine! he did but add a spice;
Not it, but man himself, himself defiles!

And when the Book in which mine acts are shown
Into the scales awaiting it is thrown,
Will they go up, I wonder, or go down?
For as they rise or fall my fate is shown!

Or should the Messenger present, instead,
Fruit from the tree of Life, turn not thy head;
Not thy aversion, nor thy prayers can stay
The penalty which He in Eden read.

Had not the Raven by example shown
How to entomb the dead, had Adam known?
For he and Eve and Abel's faithful dog
Had watched the corpse till it had putrid grown.

Were I (that Arab like) permitted to
Enter the gates and Iram's wonders view,
I would not flee in dread her silent ways
Till I had filched a rose or two for you!

Now if it be that when accounts are squared,
All those who at my hands unjustly fared
Receive of my good deeds a recompense,
Shall any good, think you, to me be spared?

And if, then, from the Tuba Tree out-flow
(As they who picture Janet Aden show)
Four rivers, one of which is ruby wine,
Oh, who would not to Janet Aden go!

So when I worship at a human shrine
Do I therein not worship the divine?
  Either I do, O Thou! or they do err
Who teach my spirit is a part of thine.

And there, likewise, dark-eyed Musk-maidens wait
Each coming of her predestined mate
  Whose hands shall dip and minister the wine,
And kisses even more the soul elate!

And when the angels of the lurid hue
Enter my tomb and bid me rise, and true
  Answers accord of all they question me,
May these be such no torture shall ensue!

Or shall the earth be closer round me pressed,
And dragons bite and sting me, thwarting rest?
  Well, I know not, but this, indeed, I know—
Death on the Sabbath day will bar their quest!

If destined I the fervid shoe to wear,
Or agonize in sweat, the while I'm there
  Before the Bar, pending my final doom,
I pray no haste in judging me He'll spare!

Then if my good deeds are not equal to
Rend'ring to each and all their rightful due,
  They may add of his sins to mine enough
To balance the account, and justice do!

But if, after sufficient has been ta'en
Of my good deeds, there yet enough remain
  To equal quite the weight of one wee ant,
Why then my life will not have been in vain!

Waste not your efforts on the creature who
Has not the wit or wish to learn of you.
The ass, we're told, the Nazarine bestrode
Were still an ass, though brought to Mecca too.

At length the Muezzen the hour declares
And the Mohammedan retires for prayers.
Which thought, I wonder, now, concerns him most—
His last misdoing or his day's affairs?

And you and I are hov'ring on the brink
Of that weird mystery which is the link
That couples Time to vast Eternity
The little scoop in Earth from which we shrink.

Well, it may be that our own fate we weave;
That the predestined one which some believe
Lies ambushed in the shadows at the end
Is but a Fancy, as we shall perceive.

The Hand that fashioned man to human shape
Likewise gave form and color to the grape,
But it was Satan mingled with its juice
The blood of lamb and lion, sow and ape!

Will thoughts confusing never cease to rise?
A tale I've heard somewhere runs on this wise:
The first man was bi-sexual, at first,
And quite a hundred-fold his present size!

Along with this exists a legend frail:
That Adam was created with a tail,
From which Almighty cleverly designed
A creature far more fair than he, but frail!

But when Adam perceived his former tail
Too frisky was by far for the female
  Designed to cheer him down the ways of life,
He prayed to God, and not without avail.

For then it was from Adam's rib He made
The woman whom the Devil sought and played
  The trick upon with the forbidden fruit
The consequence of which we can't evade.

By which recital I am forced to go
Yet further with the narrative and show
  How that the one He fashioned from the tail
Is with us in the giddy ones we know!

Yes, it is strange not one returns to tell
What Heaven is like, or what the ways of Hell—
  If Heaven is what we dream, and Hell the same,
Or if Death was, and Hell, ere Adam fell.

I say: If Solomon Ashmedai knew
To be the Evil One, yet careless grew,
  And pledged his ring to learn a magic trick,
It mattered little if he lived to rue.

Again I tell you, and its truth declare:
Who is indicted of misdoing there
  Shall have recourse to no tribunal else,
Or less relentless, yet shall justly fare.

Ah, well! might I recast my life, no doubt
'Twould leave a fairer luster when 'tis out.
  Still, the Muezzen's sight is bad, you know—
How then discern 'twixt me and the devout?

And if the Giants did the heavens invade,
And fright the gods, who thence for Egypt made,
  Blame not the gods, nor those who worshiped them
In their new forms assumed because afraid.

When the grim Ferrash strikes and spits my heart,
And my scared soul and I are doomed to part,
  Methinks I know what my last thought shall be
A-twixt the parting and the rankling dart.

For I have looked on life with scant content,
And into unknown realms my soul have sent
  Some inkling of that afterward to gain,
And it came back less knowing than it went.

If from the infinite past there came no call,
And the infinite future waved no pall,
  And hope and fear were both unknown to man,
Then were the finite present all in all.

And when into that stern, infinite past
We too, with all that went before, are cast,
  Shall we then know, think you, which end of Time—
The end that was, or end to be— 's more vast?

Lest, dreaming, I meet Siltim unawares,
I shun the groves where it is said he fares,
  Since I've no charm to wear upon my arm
To shield me from the wily demon's snares!

And if, then, it shall chance the little plot—
The grave in which we're laid at last—is not
  The end of all, as some, you know, maintain,
Where fares the soul while it awaits its lot?

The mystery of life more tangled grows
The deeper into it our reason goes;
  The Galilean solved it, certain claim,
Yet man no more of it, than ever, knows.

And those who sought and failed, and those who found
The key to riches and with wealth were crowned,
  Alike are paupers in the realm of Death—
Tenants by grace of one small plot of ground!

And this I've learned: the richest man is he
Whose wants are fewest, and a mind to see
  The folly of desires which, gratified,
Lead to yet others which can never be.

Now tell me this, I pray: If Moses knew
Whereof he wrote, why not of Satan, too?
  'Tis not a query, poked in idle jest—
I fain would know the reason, friend, from you.

And those first prophets were no less remiss.
They threatened vengeance and they promised bliss,
  Yet nought about the Evil One they said!
Now who can give a reason, pray, for this?

O soul of mine, thy fruitless quest forego!
The One True Way hast sought in vain, and so,
  Lost in a mist of doubt, bide still, and see
What is thy destiny—or weal, or woe!

Take from thy creed the all-pervading thought,
"Future Rewards and Punishment," and nought
  Of thy religion, Man, you'll find is left
To feed the hopes and fears itself has wrought.

Then if the purpose of this life is more
Than waxing merry in the wine we pour,
  Think you the Saki will get all the blame
When we the judge of all are called before?

And if the crafty priest, Benaiah, scared
The moor-hen, as toward her nest she fared,
  So that she dropped the Schamir, which he sought,
Think you that he could a lesser hazard dared?

Well, it were equally as wise, no doubt,
To make a merry jest of Life, and flout
  The ever-haunting doubts and quaking fears
Until the hour is up and lights are out!

Whereon, O Saki, one last bumper pour!
Fill up the beaker till it trickles o'er,
  Then write my epitaph, and let it read:
"Women he loved, and wine, but wine the more!"

SOUNDS AND PERSPECTIVES.

On the hillsides I have seen—
  In the springtime—great white splashes
  Of dogwood, and crimson dashes
Of red-bud amidst the green
  Of the thicket's meshes.

I have caught the tinkling sound
  Of the distant cow-bell's rattle
  On the busy, browsing cattle—
Seen the hawk, high sailing round
  When the crows gave battle.

Summer noon-tides I have stood
  'Neath the cool gloom of the beaches,
  Gazing off across the reaches
Of white heat, toward the wood,
  Where yon highway stretches.

Watched the puffs of white dust rise
  Where the teamsters knee-deep waded
  In it, goading their poor, jaded
Oxen, till the heat mine eyes
  Blinded, and all faded.

Seen the harvesters a-field,
  Caught the rhythm of the sickle
  Like a silvery fountain's trickle,
The while the season's bounteous yield
  Set their hearts a-tickle.

I've seen thin veils of blue mist (hung
By the woodland-nymphs) at morning
All the mountain tops adorning;
Heard the woodman's ax that rung
The forest tree's death warning;

Caught the homeward low of herds,
Distant, dreamy, melancholy,
Stealing o'er the meadows slowly,
And the vesper hymn of birds
In the twilight holy.

I have felt that pensiveness
We are sometimes wont to borrow
From the forecasts of the morrow,
Foreshadowings of something less
Than sheer grief or sorrow.

Felt those hopes which come and go
When anticipated pleasures
Fail to yield expected measures,
And that bitterness of woe
Over vanished treasures.

A WEIRD DREAM

I stood last night where a white mist rose
  Above a silent river,
And the eerie forms that come to those
  Who feel no joy ever,
Came to me by the silent shore
Where the pale mist drifted o'er.

The mist, it drifted over the stream,
  The moon shone blood-red through,
The stars grew dim, till no faint gleam
  Relieved the murky blue,
And a weird loneliness and dread
Crept into my sad heart instead.

My heart grew chill—a nameless fear
  Came over me, for now
Voices, long hushed, fell on my ear,
  And dank hands touched my brow—
Hands that I had felt before
Pressed my brow as oft of yore.

A voice I knew came out of the mist,
  And a form I'd known before
Came out, and bent o'er me and kissed
  My pale lips o'er and o'er,
And oh! the touch of those lips, and oh!
The breath that chilled and numbed me so!

THE FISHERMAN

O happy the life the fisherman lives,
  Healthy and happy is he;
Casting his nets and lines, he thrives,
  And laughs right merrily
As he pulls for the shore with his catch of shad,
Where waiting and watching, his tow-head lad
  Dances and sings with glee.

RE-AWAKENED

I thought that I had left it all behind me—
  The sighing, and the sorrow, and the tears;
That my heart held nothing of her to remind me
  Save that piteous, pallid, placid face of hers.

And I said, "The dead must give way to the living,
  Even as the old leaf gives way to the new,"
And "the heart is happy only when 'tis giving
  The love for love it was created to."

'Twas thus I thought, and thus I said, not knowing
  The ashes of the dead love held a spark
A breath, a sigh would change to embers glowing,
  Like the glimmer of a red light in the dark.

Then I turned me from the sweet enthralling present,
  From the glamour and the glory of her eyes,
And knew my love for her was evanescent
  As my heart sent forth the old familiar sighs.

And my heart, so lately pulsing in the sweetness
  And the warmth of love her loveliness inspired,
Is now chill, and still, and frozen to completeness,
  And the dead above the living is desired.

In the shadow of that early, bitter sorrow
  In fancy now I stand beside a grave,
And from the solemn silence seek to borrow
  The respite and the solace mortals crave.

But in vain! The fountain of all hope is dried up
By the arid winds of utter grief and woe,
And the future in the blessed past is tied up
While the silence and the shadows deeper grow.

Then a whisper seems to agitate the stillness
And the shadows are illumined by a smile,
And I see her face as ere that fatal illness
When I held her to my heart a little while.

And the face, so lately cast in marble whiteness,
Is now flushed with the rich color love imparts,
And my soul hath left the shadow for the brightness
And the beauty that illumines happy hearts.

Alas! the vision passes, and the feeling
That crushed me when they told me she was gone
Comes o'er me like a shadow, surely stealing
The sweetness that my heart was feasting on.

THINGS 'AT USED TO BE

It's many a day since I've bin here,
An' many o' them I knowed is dead,
An' most o' the old lan'-marks is fled,
'Ceptin' the road 'long the crick bank, where
Past the old schoolhouse it led.

An' when I go 'long that road now
I can't he'p thinkin' 'bout when she
Used to go 'long there with me,
Fer mem'ry will run back, somehow,
To things 'at used to be.

An' the feelin' that comes over me—
A kind o' longin' an' regret—
Makes me wish 'at I could forget
Some o' the things 'at used to be—
Some things 'at ha'nt me yet.

Fer instance, when we started to go
To meetin' once across the crick,
An' cause the old foot-log was slick,
An' partly 'cause her head swum so,
She couldn't walk it, an' turned sick.

At which I got 'most mad as sin,
An' said I knowed 'twas all put on—
Knowed ef she would, she could 'a' gone,
An' wished 'at she had fallen in
An' sp'ilt her nice new lawn.

An' then she looked so hurt, an' cried,
An' said she'd bet I'd see the day
I'd wish I hadn't talked that way—
'Specially when I knowed she'd tried,
Whatever else I'd say.

An' true as fate, her prophecy
Was all fulfilled when she lay dead,
Fer many times since then I've said
I wished to goodness gracious I
Had humored her, instead.

An' though I've loved an' wed since then,
An' though my other 'n's young and fair
As any woman breathes the air,
I can't he'p thinkin' 'bout t'other 'n' when
My heart is wrought with care.

Fer she had a way o' sayin' things,
A tender, soothin', coddlin' tone
(Which to the other 'n' is not known)
'At showed she felt an' shared the stings
Which now I bear alone.

Ah, well! ef on'y we could foresee
The bitterness a harsh word brings,
An' how the memory of it stings,
We'd ponder well, I think, 'fore we
Give ut'rance to some things.

Fer when our dead are dead, they're dead—
Ther' ain't no way to bring them back,
An' howsoe'er the conscience slack
Its vigilance, the harsh word said
Some day our heart will rack!

BURIAL OF MOSES.

No winding sheet of earthly weave
  Enwrapped the form of Moses:
Supernal hands, we may believe,
  Laid him where he reposes.

And no man saw the funeral train,
  And no man saw the burial
Out there on Moab's lonely plain,
  Except the folk ethereal.

No gloria-in-excelsis here
  On earth was ever chanted
To equal that above the bier
  Of him to whom was granted

Permission to behold a-near
  His people's sure possession,
While yet the doom rings in his ear
  That cancels his transgression.

And standing on the rugged crest
  Of Pisgah, gazing yonder,
Over the scene toward the west,
  He's little time to ponder

On what may, or may not be;
  Yet, with eye prophetic,
He sees their glorious destiny
  And mounts to heights ecstatic.

And while in this ecstatic state
  The Lord recalls his spirit,
And gives the form inanimate
  Sepulture of such merit

As never since the world began
  Was honor like accorded
To any other mortal man
  As that to him afforded.

With His own hands God laid him in
  The grave there excavated,
Rememb'ring now no more the sin
  He'd fully expiated.

And well we know an angel choir
  Sang peans at his burial,
And that a golden harp and lyre
  Added to strains ethereal.

A TRAGEDY

The morn was bright and balmy, with signs presaging rain,—
The loon's cry, the raincrow's, the tree-toad's rasping strain,—
An' we were in the woods alone, little sister an' I,
She pluckin' little blue-bells, I in a tree near by—
A small tree, a service-tree—with berries red and ripe.

Beneath the hollow of the sky a single cloud was seen;
The wind rose, the heavens paled, an' then a hazy green
Crept across the sun's face, until a shadow fell,
An' dark an' gruesome grew the wood 'round me an' sister Nell,—
The dense wood, the drear wood,—it frightened Nell an' me!

Across the hills the thunders came, an' then the lightning played;
The clouds belched, the winds shrieked, an' sister got afraid,
An' I slid down the bush an' crawled beneath a leanin' tree,
An' sister dropped her blue-bells an' nestled close to me—
'Cause she was scared, an' I was scared, as any one 'u'd be!

An' while the storm was ragin', little sister cried an' said,
"Oh! my foot hurts—the' 's thorns here!" I looked—a copper-head
Was creepin' off, an' then I knew it wasn't thorns at all,
An' when I looked to'rd her again she was about to fall,
An' I caught her an' held her, an' tried to soothe 'er pain.

An' when she kep' a cryin' I took 'er on my back,
An' bendin' low, I ran so toward our little shack.
But when I felt 'er arms loose their clasp about my neck,
I stopped an' laid 'er on the ground, an' tried to make 'er speak—
But she laid there, a strange stare in her baby eyes!

An' when she wouldn't speak or move I shouted in alarm,
An' father came an' knelt down an' took 'er on his arm,
An' kissed 'er little pale cheeks, an' wept aloud, an' said,
As he took 'er up to bear her home, "My God, my baby's dead!"
An' I cried, an' he cried—oh, how my papa cried!

Then some folks came an' stood around, an' talked in whispers low
'Bout what a awful thing it was a little child should die so.
An' when they'd made a deep hole, away down in the ground,
They laid 'er in, an' covered her, an' made a little mound,
An' ev'ry day I go there, an set by it an' cry!

PUNCHEON CRICK

I want to see the people we used to know on Puncheon—
The people that we neighbored with a dozen years or more;
Where's the use o' tryin' to be happy when you're dyin'
For the kindly, honest faces that you used to know before?

I'd like to step in on 'em when they weren't expectin' me,
An' see their look of glad surprise, an' hear 'em when they say,
" 'Tain't no use a talkin', you're the master gal to walk in
On a body unbeknown," an' "How's yer ma today?"

Oh, where's the use o' riches, when your heart is heavin' sighs,
An' your soul is filled with longin's they will not satisfy?
It sets me almost ravin', this everlastin' cravin'
The freedom of the meadows, an' the fields of wavin' rye!

When they struck the gusher on the farm, an' father sold
The place for fifty thousand, I was happy then, it seemed—
Laid awake nights buildin' castles in the air, an' gildin'
Them with ev'ry fancy that a mortal ever dreamed.

I pictured us a mansion on the Boolyvar in town,
An' carriages, a driver, an' a footman to attend,
An' myself reclinin' on a sofa-couch, a pinin'
For a truant lover, an' a-wishin' life would end.

The log-house in the country had no carpets on the floor,
An' only muslin curtains for the windows, that was all;
An' father kep' his saddle out on the porch, astraddle
Of the banister, an' bridle on a peg driv' in the wall.

The chickens an' the turkeys had their dust-bath in the yard,
The geese an' ducks their lavatory near the garden fence,
An' I used to think the noise of the geese, an' ducks, an' boys,
An' the peafowls an' the guineas would deprive me of my sense.

Then think of us a havin' pictured carpets on the floors,
An' rugs of bear an' tiger skins, with heads, an' claws, an' all,
So lifelike that I've trembled, so much the things resembled
The real, livin' creatures, 'specially that one in the hall.

I'd like to be a-livin' back on Puncheon Crick again,
Where, unconcerned with etiquette, an' fashionable gush,
I'd go to meetin' Sundays, an' wash an' iron Mondays,
An' help to rake an' rick the hay durin' the harvest rush.

I'd like to see Belinda Yeager go a-ridin' by
On her flea-bitten critter, with her basket on her lap,
All in a pleasant flutter, thinkin' what her eggs an' butter
Would buy to trim her weddin' gown, to marry Silas Knap.

An' there is Larkin' Rudd, who used to come a sparkin' me;
I'd like to see him ridin' down the lane, as oft of yore,
Ev'ry Sunday mornin', a holly-hock adornin'
The lapel of the skimpy seersucker coat he wore.

I used to think when I'd so much to do out on the farm,
To milk, an' churn, an' sweep, an' half a hundred other things,
I'd like to be a lady of leisure, in some shady
Nook a readin' novels, an' a wearin' diamond rings.

But now that I have tried it I would willin'ly exchange
My boodwar in the city for my garret snug retreat,
Where the rhythmic patter of the rain upon the latter
Would send me off to dreamland on the wings of slumber sweet.

Ah, well! we're ne'er more happy, once we've grown
wordly wise.
An' true it is that ignorance is happiness instead;
The path hill-people follow to their cabin up some
hollow
Alone leads where contentment neath a rustic roof
is bred.

PREMONITION

"Rora, O Rora! the winds are wild,
And the waves run high on the sea;
I fear, oh I fear for the fate of our child
To-night, wherever he be!"

"Ah, Katie, the boy is a fearless lad,
And knows how to reef a sail;
Little he cares if the sea is mad,
And the winds do shriek and wail."

"Yes, Rora, I know he is fearless and brave,
Yes, fearless and brave is he,
But what could he with an angry wave
On the breast of a raging sea?

"Go watch on the beach, where the waves may throw
His lifeless form to-night;
For, Rora, he'll perish to-night, I know,
And my heart is breaking, quite."

When morning dawned they found him there,
A pale, cold corpse on the sand,
With sea-ooze clinging in his hair,
Sea-ooze clutched in his hand.

HIDDEN GEMS

There are many little gems of thought
Deep-hidden in the poet's mind,
Which, though he try, he yet cannot
Reveal to any but his kind.

THE BETTER WAY

Come thou, O Muse, cease thy light dalliance;
Too long, methinks, hast trilled soft, witless airs
To love-sick maid and shallow-pated swain.
Leave such to those of little wit and worth,
And tread with me the unfrequented ways
That lead toward the border lands of Myth,
Where Bellerophon Pegasus bestrode,
Ere Homer sang, or Pindar tuned his lyre,
Or magic mind of Eschylus had wrought
To open graves and bring "pale spectres" forth
To strut the stage and frighten timid hearts;
Where elves, and nymphs, and fauns, and satyrs dwell,
And fairies come and go, and sirens flute
In coverts green, and lure to certain death
Who would a fancied assignation keep.

LAKE O' THE WHITE CANOE

"Woe! woe!" the phantom sang,
"Woe to the hapless swain—
Woe to the trusting maid
Whom parents cross in love,
Woe to the lovers twain
    If he and she
    A trysting flee
To the Lake of the White Canoe!

"O may they shun the spot,
The dark and mirey fen,
The drear and dismal wood
That skirts the stagnant pool,
And seek a trysting place
    Beyond the bound
    And dreary sound
Of the Lake of the White Canoe.

"The she-wolf loves the spot,
The muckwa prowleth there;
Here sounds the hoot-owl's cry,
Here croak the frogs and thrum,
Here sings the muckawis,
    And the copperhead
    Here makes his bed
By the Lake of the White Canoe.

"At night here may be heard,
If hushed the muckawis,
And silent the she-wolf's tread,
Unheard the muckawa's growl,
Suppressed the hoot-owl's cry,
The measured dip
Of a paddle's tip
On the Lake of the White Canoe.

"And there likewise is heard
Words of a tender song,
Whose burden is a tale,
Sung to a touching strain,
As through the pale white mist
A boat with two
Glides into view
On the Lake of the White Canoe.

"Ages have come and gone
Since this sad thing befell.
My father told it me,
His father's father him,
And from his father he
Received the tale
Of the lover's bale
On the Lake of the White Canoe.

"Upon the Great Arm's brink,
In that far away time,
Dwelt the brave Roanokes,
Most dreaded of the wilds,
The whizzing of whose crest
Scared all away,
Traditions say,
From the Lake of the White Canoe.

"Among the brave Roanokes
A youth and maiden dwelt,
Who from their childhood loved—
The brave Annawan he,
The fair Pequida she—
And oft at night
They'd row in sight,
On the lake in a white canoe.

"He the son of a chief,
She a warrior's daughter,
He the son of a Roanoke,
And she a Maqua's pride,
Which two brave men were foes
When maid and youth
Plighted their troth
On the Lake of the White Canoe.

"From childhood's happy hours
Together they had roamed
Bosky dell and bower,
Woodland glen and hollow,
Or by the river's brink
Ever they strayed,
And gaily played
Near the Lake of the White Canoe.

"At last their sires forbade
The courtship of the twain,
Whereon by stealth they met,
Despite the stern decree,
And every summer eve
They sought the tryst
Beneath the mist,
On the Lake of the White Canoe.

" 'Twas thus for moons they met
While darkness veiled the earth,
Naught caring for the wolf
That skulked amidst the brake,
Nor for the muckwa's growl,
Could they but feel
The bliss and weal
Of love in a white canoe.

"When autumn came and brought
The summer's bounteous yield—
The fields of ripened maize,
The vines of clustering grapes,—
It brought likewise a bane,
For now no more
Put off from shore
The twain in a white canoe.

"For now their sires had heard
How, at the midnight hour,
That those who walked the beach,
Or watched the lick for deer,
Oft heard a tender song,
And sometimes caught,
Or so they thought,
A glimpse of a white canoe.

"And thus the maiden's sire
Did question her and say,
'Pequida, it is said—
A little bird told me—
That oft at night is seen
A white canoe,
Wherein are two—
Tell me, daughter, is either you?'

"Then from the maiden's eyes
Came, like the summer's rain,
The tears she could not stay,
As thus she answered him,
'I love brave Annawan,
And oft, I own
As thou has shown,
We meet in our white canoe.'

" 'Love the son of my foe,
Knowing the bitter wrongs
That he has heaped on me!
Harken, then, to my words,
And tryst no more with him,
Nor be thou seen
Mist-waves between,
On the lake, in a white canoe.'

"Annawan's father said,
'A bird has whispered me—
Who walks the beach at night,
Beneath the moon and stars,
May see, upon the lake,
A white canoe
In which are two—
Answer, my son, if one be you?'

"Then answered Annawan,
'A warrior's soul is mine—
I will not falsify;
The bird hath told thee true;
I love the Maqua's daughter,
And oft at night,
By dim star-light,
We tryst, in a white canoe.'

" 'Listen, my son, to me.
You must forego your suit,
Nor wed the Maqua maid,
Or meet her day or night
On the lake or land,
That to my ear
These tales I hear—
Come not—of a white canoe.'

"At night came to the lake
The maiden, young and fair,
And thus self-queried she,
'Why comes not Annawan,
My lover leal and true,
To go with me,
As often he
Hath gone, in our white canoe?

" 'Oh surely he has come
And sails the lake alone;
And though the wind is strong,
And rough the lake, and wild,
I must his barque pursue,
For it may be
He looks for me
On the lake, in his white canoe.'

"Into her barque she sprang,
And left the shore alone.
Loud shrieked the winds and moaned,
Fierce pealed the thunder's crash,
And vivid lightnings threw
Their lurid rays
Where madly plays
The waves with her white canoe.

"Wildly she shrieked his name,
And strained her eyes for him.
The thunders drowned her cries,
Her eyes the lightning dimmed,
As through the driving spray
Onward she flew
In tears and rue,
O'er the lake in her white canoe.

"At last with hasty strides
Annawan seeks the tryst,
But finds Pequida gone,
And likewise, too, her barque;
Whereon his heart despairs,
For well he knows
The storm that blows
Must surely wreck her white canoe.

" 'My fair Pequida, come—
Come back to me!" he cries;
But answer none hears he,
Though, glimmering through the mist
A small white speck appears
Gliding along,
While a death song
Comes back from the white canoe.

"Into his canoe then
Annawan quickly sprang,
And bounded o'er the wave,
Pursuing barque and song.
And though he saw and heard
All night long
Both barque and song,
Vain his chase of the white canoe.

"At morn he sought his sire,
And thus upbraided him:
' 'Twas you that made her grave
Deep in the Dismal Swamp,
Whither I too shall go,
And e'er at night
You'll see a light
Where we paddle our white canoe!'

"So saying, he turned away,
And never was seen again
By either friend or foe;
But oft at night, I know,
The shade of youth and maid,
With fire-fly lamp
The Dismal Swamp
Skim, paddling a white canoe."

LOVE

I know not when you crept into my heart,
  Or if direct, or by some sinuous way:
I only know you came, and are a part
  Now of my life forever and for aye.

I think, may be, by way of thy soft eyes,
  Or by thy kindly, gentle mien you came:
At any rate, in some such subtile guise
  You found my heart, and lit the mystic flame.

And flowers now a sweeter fragrance yield,
  The songs of birds are sweeter than they were,
A fairer sheen bedecks both wood and field,
  Softer and purple-hazed the atmosphere.

If this be love—as it must surely be—
  (Else what could so the heart and soul enthrall),
Then give me love, for love is ecstasy,
  When it so casts a glamour over all.

A VIOLET

From the far hills, dear wife, I send
  This little mountain flower,
Whose tints to pure cerulean tend—
  Born of an April shower.

And, nestling in its petals tender,
  A kiss I send to thee,
Knowing thou wilt homage render
  Such token, love, from me.

Nor is the tint its petals holds
  Truer, dear, to it than I
Unto the one my heart enfolds
  With a love that cannot die.

MEETING AND PARTING

Hail! farewell! farewell and hail!
Gladness, sadness, joy and woe,
Beginning and end of an old, old tale,
Ah me! a tale we all must know.

MY SORROW

Because who was the world and all to me is dead,
I cannot look upon a little golden head,
But I am forced to turn aside and weep awhile,
Or hide my agony behind a tear-veiled smile,
Lest others, seeing it, should pause and pity me,
Or mock my woe by staring curiously.

Oh! it is hard to look upon the little face,
Lying there mutely in its snowy, coffin place,
Knowing no more we'll hear it lisp our name, or feel
Its precious arms about our neck in rapture steal.

THE DOLL'S DRESS

I found this garment here to-day,
  Moth-marked, and in some places moulded:
God bless the little hands that folded it away—
  The little hands, themselves now folded!

HEART STRAINS

O heart of mine! so prone to sing;
  O lips! too weak to utter
The songs that constantly upspring,
  Only to flutter, flutter,
As beats the 'prisoned bird its wing
  Against the potent shutter,
  Impotent I—impotent we
  To charm the world with minstrelsy.

Yet sing, O heart, thy songs divine,
  More oft they charm than pain me—
And as the frailest twig the vine
  Sustains, so they sustain me;
For as love's tendrils hearts entwine,
  Thy subtile strains enchain me,
  And evil thoughts depart in haste
  At sound of melodies so chaste.

VIRGINIA

Down by the cottage stile,
  In the afterglow
Of the summer twilights
  In the long ago,
She and I together
  Watched the roses bloom—
Now their fragrance they diffuse
  About Virginia's tomb.

'Neath the elm's foliage
  Stood the cottage low
Overlaced with creepers
  That clambered o'er it so
You couldn't tell the color,
  Or if board or thatch,
Though now and then a glimmer
  Of color you might catch,

Where the shifting foliage,
  Shaken by the breeze,
Parted for a moment,
  Showing bits of frieze
Or a patch of gable,
  Where the robins sung
'Neath the rakish cornice
  Where the ivy clung.

Climbing roses blossomed
O'er the portico,
The path was made of pebbles
To the stile below,
And though a great profusion
Of shrubbery was seen,
Everything was tidy,
The garden neat and clean.

In the bowered windows
Potted flowers stood.
Often bent above them,
In a pensive mood,
I have seen Virginia
As lightsomely I strode
Up the pebbled pathway
To my love's abode.

That was in the heyday
Of a youthful dream,
Ere our little shallop neared
The rapids of life's stream
Where the cruel waters swept
My darling from my side,
Whereon I left my boat to drift,
And bowed my head and cried.

And often in the gloaming,
As in the long ago,
I wander to the cottage stile,
Backward, to and fro,
Where (maybe it is fancy)
I sometimes seem to see
My sweet Virginia tripping
Down the pebble-path to me.

Then when the vision fadeth
I wander to a grave
Out beyond the garden wall,
Where with my tears I lave
The modest little flowers
Blooming o'er the spot,
The pink and purple pansies
And sweet forget-me-not.

"BROKE"

The friends (?) who flocked around us when
Both wealth and worth were ours
Now pass around us, as you've seen
Bees shun insipid flowers.

The moth that flutters 'round the flame
Till it ceases to burn
Is quick indeed to shun the same,
The waning light to spurn.

What can't be cured we must endure,
It is misfortune's gift;
It is the penalty the poor
Must pay for lack of thrift.

BURIED HOPES

O blessed, buried hopes, wherewith are laid
  The cherished loves of many pleasant dreams!
How oft beside thy graves we've wept or prayed!
  Nor deemed it folly then, as now it seems.

As now it seems! Nor was it folly then,
  For what were life without these dreams of ours?
A lonely, barren waste, where meets the ken
  No pleasant thing, no fragrant flowers.

And even now, as oft we stray alone
  Amidst these buried loves, these treasured wrecks,
We sometimes pause beside a broken stone
  To trace a name the weary heart detects.

O heart of man! and weeping woman's too,
  But for these fleeting, transitory gleams
What would the souls of weeping mortals do
  If memory no more diffused her beams?

HOPE AND DOUBT

Some where, some time, I know not when,
  My heart shall wake to a sweet surprise
When one steps out from the ranks of men,
  And gazing deep down into my eyes
Shall take my hand, and then, ah then!
My heart shall wake to a sweet surprise!

We women, you know, will dream and dream,
  Till the fate that lies in wait for us all
Arrests our barque, adrift on the stream,
  And binds our heart in a golden thrall.
Will it be for weal, or the fateful gleam
  That goes before a woman's fall?
For women, you know, are frail in love,
  While men are wily, and prone to sue,
And swear by the stars and all above
  That they will be leal and true,
And we sometimes yield all to prove
  That we can be leal and loyal too.

So, in the awakening I may know,
  Shall I find the love and peace I crave,
Or awake to a life of shame and woe?
  Of lust and sin shall I be a slave?
When tempted to err, shall I answer no?
  God pity my weakness, and make me brave!

DAN AND LIL

"Which do you want?" said Dan to me,
Where I set across the hearth from him;
"Fer sence it's got we can't agree,
We may as well git things in trim.
You kin hev whichever farm you will,
An' a one-ha'f int'rest in the mill."

Of late there'd been a hitch, somehow,
An' to save our lives we couldn't agree,
An' so we'd about concluded, now,
Thet it wuz better to part, you see—
He takin' one farm, an' me t'other,
Seemed better'n tryin' to live t'gether.

"An' then there is the stock, y'know—
The cattle, an' hosses, sheep, an' such,
You kin hev your shur o' them also,
Ur ef a little more, I don't keer much.
An' I hope you'll find, as y' think y' will,
You'll be better off without me, Lil.

"But I'm thinkin," said he, coughin'-like,
An' lookin' jest like he did thet day
They took an' buried our little Ike,
"Thet mebby, Lil, you'd better stay
In the old place here, jest es it is,
You keepin' the trinkets, an' things o' his.

"Fer I'm shore," he said, coughin' ag'in,
"Ef he'd a knowed, afore he died,
This wuz a goin' to happen, then
You'd a got all his in the divide;
Which knowin', I'd hate to hev it said
I didn't respect the wish o' my dead."

I didn't durst fer to look at him,
Knowin' he wuz lookin' straight at me;
My heart wuz full, my eyes wuz dim
Wi' the mist an' haze of memory;
Fer I seed our lives es they hed bin
'Fore a cross, harsh word hed entered in—

When our home wuz al'ys full of cheer,
An' both our hearts wuz filled with joy,
He a settin' thar, me a settin' here,
Watchin' th' pranks of our little boy,
Now a kissin' Dan, ur a makin' me
Set with him on his daddy's knee.

An' how he'd clap his han's with glee
When Dan 'u'd pull me out fer a romp,
Es he of'en did, jest fer to see
Our little darlin' laugh an' stomp!
An' then, sometimes, when his romp wuz o'er,
He'd fall asleep at our feet, on the floor.

Then Dan 'u'd come an' set by me,
Takin' my hand in th' tend'rest way,
An' talk of our joys, an' th' love thet we
Found a growin' sweeter day by day.
"An' now," I thought, with a sinkin' heart,
"Dan an' me are about to part."

An' my heart kep' swellin' more an' more
  Es one a'ter another mem'ry came,
Till I got up an' walked the floor
  Tryin' to think which wuz to blame;
But *his* faults wuz hid in th' fust sweet years,
An' c'u'dn't be seen through a mist o' tears!

An' when my heart seemed breakin' with pain
  I saw Dan crossin' th' room to me,
An' to save my life I can't explain
  How it all happened—I know thet he
Pressed me to 'is heart, an' kissed my cheek,
An' when at last I wuz able to speak,

Sez I to Dan'l, "Say what y' will—
  I don't want this ner the other farm,
Ner a one-ha'f int'rest in th' mill—
  I jest want your protectin' arm
To shield me es long es we both sh'll live,
An' all th' love yer able to give."

POLICY—NOT LOVE

"The woman I love," said he, "I know
  Treats me well for the tribute I bring,
And not for love's sweet sake alone—
  Which thought is a bitter thing."

So saying, he dropped his head, and I
  Marked that a tremor shook him through,
And for his grief I could have wept,
  And for what some women will do.

"Ah, truly love is blind!" I said,
  "Or will not see, e'en when it might;
For from the first her heart he read,
  But closed his eyes to the light!"

And because he loved this woman so,
  From morn he strove till day grew dim,
Giving love and wealth without return—
  Thus daily she robbed him!

A MEMORY

I do not know why it is to-day
  I dream so much of the past,
Why it is I turn so often away
  From the present to that last
Sweet, sad tryst by the river side,
  Far back in the halcyon days
Of my youth-time, where my 'trothed bride
  And I had met always.

'Twas autumn time, and the leaves lay brown,
  On the springy mould below,
And the sunbeams, creeping through, lay down
  At our feet, as if they'd know
Whereof my bride betrothed and I
  Talked in that low, soft strain,
While the limpid waters, gliding by,
  Chanted a sweet refrain.

Mayhap some subtile touch of hers
  Hath woke the dormant strings
Of my sad heart, and brought those years
  Back with the dear, dead things
Which I had thought were lost beneath
  The debris of life's waste,
So that the sweetness which they breathe
  I once again might taste.

'Tis many years, though now they seem
So many months instead,
Since that last tryst, by that lone stream,
And my darling, long since dead,
Is young and fair, as on that day,
And I again possess
That buoyancy that soars away
Beyond all pensiveness.

'Tis years ago, and the restless tide
Of life hath crept apace,
Yet the golden dreams of youth abide
With me, and her sweet face,
Crowned with its wealth of auburn hair
I sometimes see, and feel
Her touch (sweet antidote for care!)
Across my hot brow steal.

CUPID'S WILES

Cupid, they say, one summer day
  Went to the river bathing,
And flung his bow and quiver,
  And gauzy clothes beneath a rose
On the margent of the river.

A pretty maid that morning strayed
  Aimlessly to the river,
And found young mischief sleeping,
  And then and there she laid a snare
To get him in her keeping.

Beneath the rose she 'spied his clothes,
  Likewise his bow and quiver,
And caught them to her heart,
  And while he slept she slowly crept
A little ways apart.

Alas! such dreams as maidens' schemes,
  It was just what he wanted—
The very thing at which he'd aimed.
  He knew the dart lay next her heart,
Which soon must be inflamed.

From his repose he slowly rose,
  And followed slowly after,
Only to find her weeping.
  "My pretty maid," he, laughing, said,
"Thou hast me in thy keeping!"

FAITHLESS

I give thee back thy troth to-night,
And in return my own I claim.
I love thee, but would shun the blight
I'd suffer if I shared thy name.

Return my troth, and take the ring
It is not meet that I should wear,
And time, maybe, will heal the sting
A woman's pride hath planted there.

LIFE

Sweet is that life
Whose noon is pure and faultless as its dawn,
With no regrets to cast their sombre hue
Across the narrow way it journeys on,
Or steep the eyes in bitter drops of rue.

Life is at best,
Methinks, no sweeter than our faintest dream
Of its felicities makes it appear,
And we should nurture tender thoughts, and deem
Ourselves most fortunate when hope is near.

The tide of life
Has many rapids that our barque must shoot,
And woe betide who near its maelstroms glides!
It is at best a treacherous stream, and foot
By foot let's sound it from our shallop's sides.

There is a way—
A narrow channel, which if we will seek,
And ship aboard the Pilot ever near,
Then may we reach the harbor without leak
Or hap of any kind that we need fear.

Alas! how few—
How few compared to those who hourly embark
Upon the bosom of this treacherous stream,
Call on this Pilot, or His warnings hark,
Till comes the wreck and drifts their boat a-beam!

LOOKING BACKWARD

The days are drear, the nights are long,
  The years are filled with vain regret,
And there are catches in the song
  We sing because we can't forget.

How many a sigh the chasm spans
  That separates us from the past,
Across which we, on knees and hands,
  Were fain to creep, could we, at last!

THE POET

The flight of mind is never higher
Than its native gifts inspire;
'Tis genius furnishes the wings
On which the poet mounts and sings.

The adage that the poet's born
Hath never of its truth been shorn,
For never yet the poet made
To the succeeding ages played.

THE BANSHEE

The night it was serene and moonlit,
  In the sere, melancholy October,—
  The last night but one of October,—
And, taking my viol, "I'll tune it,"
  I said, "to comport with this sober,
Unutterable mood of my soul";
And lo! there came out of my viol
A tone I had felt in my soul!

And I said, "That is surely an echo
  From the far, remote shores of Lethe,—
  The dim, indistinct shores of Lethe,—
The plaint of Ulysses, whom Calypso
  Enslaved on the Isle of Ogygia—
Whom the fair nymph Calypso enslaved,
For eight weary years kept encaved
On the Isle of Ogygia, enslaved."

Then something, whatever I knew not,
  Impelled me to look to'rd the window,—
  The vine-arbored, moon-checkered window,—
And I swear upon fancy I drew not
  For what I saw there peering into
My room, nor for the wild, uncanny shriek
Which drove the blood back to my heart from
    my cheek,—
O that wild, weird, unearthly, uncanny shriek!

Its face closely pressing the casement,
  The moonlight falling full on its hair,—
  On its long, dankish, disheveled hair,—
Stood something, I saw with amazement,
  A woman or banshee, I swear!
Then, shrieking again, it departed,
And I let fall my viol, and started
With fright as it shrieked and departed.

And I said, "That is surely an omen,
  Some evil portent I am sure,—
  A dread Scottish banshee I'm sure,—
The wraith of some unhappy woman
  Come out of her sphere, to allure
Some precious soul of my household away!"
(And my lips they grew ashen and gray)
"Lure the soul of some loved one away!"

I sighed as I reached for the shattered,
  Wrecked viol that lay at my feet,—
  The fiddle I'd dropped at my feet,—
Of whose utter ruin it mattered
  But little, since soon I must greet
That grim-visaged monster that enters
The fold where affection all centers—
O the grim monster our love-fold that enters!

VISIONS

Oh! forms of beauty, which adorn our dreams,
  Oh! mystic sounds of music sweet and rare,
How unattainable, which ever seems
  So near, O thou more subtile things than air!

Why is it so—why is the poet given
  Glimpses of things no mortal can portray?
Why are these sounds across his senses driven
  To linger for a while and pass away?

And why those forms evanish while his hands
  In rapturous longing are stretched out to them?
Than which 'twere easier to count the ocean's sands
  Than 'twere to touch their garment's hem.

But so it is—the poet's dream is vain;
  He may see, but may not paint these faces;
May hear, but may not sound one single strain
  Seen and heard in Fancy's mystic places.

JEPHTHAH'S VOW

Oh! rash man that I was, to blindly vow
A sacrifice to God, well knowing how
Like her 'twould be her father first to greet
With timbrels, song and mazy-moving feet—
The first on whom mine eyes shouldst light when I,
Returning from the conquest, must rely
On fate, or chance for what must first appear
To greet the vision. Love for my child and fear
Of His just wrath, should I fail of my vow,
War in my heart. Ah me! well wot I now
The throes that rent poor father Abraham
Ere he espied the thorn-entangled ram:
Oblation providentially ensnared,
He might the sacrifice and grief be spared.

Oh! baleful chance, O fate! why didst decree
My daughter first of all that I shouldst see?
Would mine eyes had been holden—that my sight
Had been darkened to the densest night,
Ere on my darling they were led to light!

O fate! O chance! O cursed chance and fate!
Alas! I see my error now too late!

SIN'S PUNITION

Ever I've been the mark of fate,
  Fared illy at the hands of Time;
Either a bit too soon or late
  Has kept me ever out of chime.

Never a time, far off or near,
  Clouds intercepted not my view;
Never my steps led anywhere,
  It was not to regret or rue.

My heart was never free from sighs,
  My soul was never free from dread;
Never but stalked before my eyes
  Some horrid phantom of the dead.

I've walked the crowded streets, and been
  As lonely as in woodlands drear;
I've stood in forests dense and seen
  Gay myriads moving ev'rywhere.

I've loved, nor had my love returned;
  I've prayed, nor had it given heed;
Sought Wisdom in her haunts, and learned
  I'd missed this most excessive need.

My way across life's waste I've found
  Entangled with a prickly growth;
Each step I take invites a wound,
  Till to proceed I'm growing loth.

Yet when I would return I find
A yawning chasm intervenes
Between the years that lie behind,
And present, uninviting scenes.

A gleam of hope, once now and then,
Far in the distance I have caught,
But always it has faded when,
Forespent and faint, I reach the spot.

Yet daily I am touching hands
With those who've found the better way,
Whose daily walk and life commands,
I find, what I'm denied to-day.

Such is the soul that dwells within
The ruin which its own has wrought,
And ponders on the might have been
Had Youth the other pathway sought.

A MEMORY

Let's see: It was ever so long ago
That she and I sat here together;
How many years though, I do not know,
Though I know 'twas autumn weather.

'Twas autumn I know, for I made a crown
Of the red maple leaves that lay at her feet,
Or fell in her lap as they circled down—
Less bright than the rose on her cheek.

'Twas autumn, I know, for the chestnuts brown
Peeped out from the burs on the swaying bough,
The winds playing over which shook them down—
Oh! I wish she were here with me now.

MY DEAD

Poor little hands! they are folded now,
  Oh! how many times their loving touch
Have caressed and soothed my aching brow—
  Poor little hands! there are no more such.

Poor pale lips! now so mute and still!
  No unkind word fell from them ever.
Where they could not warm they would not chill,
  Or could not bind they would not sever.

Dear little heart! it is pulseless now;
  How warmly it beat for others' woes,
How faithful it was to the lightest vow—
  Only the heart of another knows.

Dear little feet! they were weary when
  The angel came for her, but they
Gladly answered the summons then—
  Would they could answer mine to-day.

LOST LEOLINE

Oh! bitter the day and cold,
  Oh! stormy the night and long,
When my lost love, my Leoline,
  Went down in the billows strong.

Oh! why should thy waves return
  To thy bosom again, O sea!
When my lost love, my Leoline,
  Can never come back to me?

BITTER MEMORIES

I've jest bin down in the orchard there,
  An' I tell you what, it ain't no use
To make believe 'at we don't care
  Ef things don't turn out es we'd choose.

Fer when we've lost some cherished thing,
  Er missed our way to some one's heart,
I can't he'p thinkin' thet the sting
  Leaves in our after life a smart.

An' when revisitin' old scenes,
  An' trampin' 'long the old by-ways,
Over the hills, an' cross ravines
  'At we have trod in by-gone days,

Somehow we can't he'p pausin' here,
  Er hurryin' past some object there
'At brings to mind some memory dear,
  Er birthplace of some bitter care.

A tree whose leafy boughs we've seen
  Sheddin' its ample shadders round,
While shafts of sunlight slipped between
  An' danced an' quivered on the ground,

It may be is the thing we'd shun,
  Er Mecca, may be, we have sought,
As the gauntlet of the past we run,
  With sweet or bitter memories fraught.

AN IDYL

Here, poor tired, aching heart, just here,
  Beneath this friendly spreading beechen limb,
We'll pause awhile, repressing memory's tear—
  Memory or time or distance cannot dim,
But grows more sweet or bitter with each year
  As joy's cup or sorrows nears the brim,
Albeit, the remembrance of a bier
  Doth shroud our lives as did the grave-clothes him.

Here in the smooth, light-clouded bark appear
  Two names, with day and date all neatly done,
Showing the wear and tear of lapsing years
  Hath plainer made the handiwork of one
Whom we have mourned with scarce surcease of tears
Since the still, cold lips mutely sealed our fears!

ADDRESS TO A MUMMY

Come, tell me, Mummy, if you can,
  How many times hath reappeared
  Thy soul in reptile, beast, and bird
Since it cast off the guise of man?

And when he rendered his decree,
  Did Osiris enumerate
  The sins that it should expiate
Ere it returned again to thee?

Who wert thou ere bereft of soul?
  What was thy calling, what thy caste?
  Between thy present and thy past
Couldst count how many ages roll?

If one of those of priestly caste,
  What of that esoteric lore
  You held above both rich and poor?—
A menace dire in that dim past!

Perchance wert of those Pharaoah
  Commissioned to enhance the task
  Of those whom Moses came to ask
Might with him three days' journey go?

Yet scarcely so, for doubtless those
  Were caught in that catastrophe
  Along with others in the sea,
When God bade the walled waters close.

Well, it were no far-fetched conceit
To fancy you witnessed the test
When Aaron's rod devoured the rest—
All writhing serpents at their feet!

And if not there, of course you passed
Through those dire plagues which Aaron's rod,
(Mirac'lously endowed of God)
O'er all the land but Goshen cast.

Thou canst not be that Potiphar
Whose wife had fain debauched the Jew?
Well, somehow I am glad that you
Were not, and knew naught of her.

Where were you when (tradition'ly)
The moon increased to that extent
The Libyans, on rebellion bent,
Frightened, renewed their fealty?

Is it not irksome to be wound
So closely in a winding sheet?
Heavens! how can you stand your feet,
And hands, and all so tightly bound?

Didst live what time that King, Kakan,
(Who worship of the bull, Apsis,
First introduced in old Memphis)
His celebrated reign began?

Where was thy seat of empire, pray?
Was it at This? Didst thou live there?
That much, at least, you might declare—
Canst thou not answer yes or nay?

Where wert when Rameses, the Great,
  Led forth his mighty hosts to war,
  By land and sea to Ganges, far?
Was that before your time? Please state.

Perhaps wert living when the Nile
  Ran honey one and ten whole days
  (Believing what Manetho says),
Quaffing it daily all the while!

It could not be you helped to make
  That enigmatic thing, the Sphinx;
  Scarcely could be so old, methinks,
Though eons wander in thy wake.

Was there an ante-death compact
  Whereby thy soul, on its return
  From its thousands of years sojourn
Elsewheres, shouldst find its house intact?

Well, if you will not answer, then
  Suppose we must forego our quest,
  Though we could relish with much zest
Who thou wert, where didst live, and when.

What! Come now, Mummy, know a jest
  (Even when of all grossness stripped),
  From lips through which a soul hath slipped,
However apt, imparts no zest.

Whose reign? Usertesen—the Third!
  Planned that great Labyrinth and Lake?
  Well, for thy very age's sake
We must, of course, accept thy word.

Yet ne'ertheless, some doubt remains,
For that sounds very like a lie;
If so, you'll find out by and by
One Satan down in Hades reigns.

TO THE FROGS

Wherever stagnant pools or streams are found,
Or mucky fen or marshy meadow, ye
Are heard to croak and murmur drear'ly,
Lulling the silence with a dreamy sound,
Thy red throats quaking with the grating strain
That slides out brokenly across the plain,
From lungs forespent with ceaseless murmuring,
That nature gave ye not the power to sing.

From morn till noon and noon till night again,
And constantly all through the night till morn,
With sober, solemn look and mien forlorn,
Ever the same ye murmur and complain,
Blinking the stars, or sheathing from the sun
Thy leaden orbs, since time and tide begun.

WESTERN PLAINS

A brooding silence hovers over all
  This vast expanse of undulating plain,
Whence one is conscious of that voiceless call
  (Ye all have caught it time and time again),

Soul beckoning to soul across the waste
  That intervenes between the Now and Then,
One soul urging the other soul to haste,
  Yet never, never intimating when

The waters of the dreaded stream shall tear
  Life from its precarious moorings here,
And thence toward the mystic harbor bear
  It, 'spite of wife's, or child's, or mother's tear.

Not yon vast, blue, inverted bowl alone
  Is it obstructs my human vision's range;
God curbed my sight, lest unto me be known
  The image of the thing to which I change.

And though ('tis claimed) we may sometimes behold
  Our spirit-selves projected into view,
We doubt if these are yet the same we're told
  That we shall wear when we are made anew.

There are so many forms in earth and sky,—
  So many, many kinds of beast and bird,—
I wonder, now, if I shall still be I
  When the loud blast of the last trump is heard?

Each sect doubts—each and all—the other's creeds,
And most of them Metempsychosis flouts,
Yet he who reads, and ponders what he reads,
May find himself at last hemmed in with doubts.

What is to be is not within the ken
Of man, and speculation reigns supreme;
Yet each must feel there is beyond a Then
Which shall, somehow, approach his life-long dream.

Eternity abuts upon the lines
Which circumscribe the narrow plains of Time,
Whose swiftly flowing tide an outlet finds
In the dark stream we cross to the sublime.

Wrapped in a silence which is all their own,
Guarding the secrets of their mystic past,
These plains suggest to Fancy things, if known,
Would cause the mind to pause, and shrink, aghast.

O crypt-like Future, whence no light projects
A radiant gleam along Life's darkened way,
Vouchsafe one glimmer till my soul detects
My Master's footprints in the sand, I pray!

THE ERRANT DOLLAR.

As fleeting as time, as errant as air,
Not pausing for story or song,
I sigh as you slip from my hand to fare
On your mission of right or wrong.

Mine for a moment, and then you're away
On your errand of good or evil,
Relieving the wants of a saint to-day,
To-morrow glad'ning the Devil,

As into the till of the bar you clink
From the hand of the maudlin youth,
Who dallies and drains to the dregs the drink
In the drunkard's school, forsooth.

From the till to the bank, and then, may be,
You'll burn a Samaritan's palms,
Till he findeth a place for charity,
And the giving of worthy alms.

Thence to the butcher's or the grocer's till
You will find your path straightway,
From whence you will go to cancel a bill
That he finds he needs must pay.

Then around to the church, maybe, you'll swing,
And drop in the deacon's tray,
As he passeth it round while the choir-folk sing,
And the devoutly righteous pray.

Thence to cancel the debt the miser holds
Against the house of the Lord,
Who hides you amidst the convolute folds
Of his purse, and sneaks for his hoard.

THE PHANTOM THOUGHT

Away, dread thing! thou dark, unbidden guest;
  Unheralded and unexpected thou
Too oft hath broken in upon my rest,
  And, passing, left thy shadow on my brow.

Thou dost the very realm of hope invade,
  Casting a ling'ring shadow over all;
Scarcely one single move in life I've made,
  Thou wert not there to flaunt a fun'ral pall.

Light hearted, humming some quick-moving air,
  I've left my home at morn with lightsome stride,
Feeling how very bright the world, and fair,
  When, lo! you came, and on my lips it died!

No place so sacred thou dost not intrude;
  No heart from thy disturbing presence free;
I mind me at my bridal thou wert rude
  Enough to show an open grave to me.

Between my loved ones and my eyes you flash
  A vision of a coffin or a bier,
And from my lips the cup of gladness dash,
  And in its stead tender a draught of fear.

No mercy on the doting heart hast thou,
  But harry it with scenes of darkest hue,
Wherein its cherished ones are made to bow
  To stern adversity, and plead and sue.

Avaunt, thou dark intruder, nor return
  Till the last sputter of life's flick'ring ray
To point with low'ring brow and finger stern
  To'rd that waste blackness whitherto we stray!

EPIGRAMS

Time from his throne hath looked ahead in vain
For lo these eons past to glimpse, perchance,
The dreaded herald of his closing reign.

Now it is strange the path we daily tread
Lies straight before us to the utmost end,
Yet we may never see a step ahead!

Oceans embrace our earth, a liquid band
Twines it about,—seeming anomaly,—
Round-rolling in the hollow of God's hand.

Is it not strange that we can never retrace
Our way to youth and childhood's aureate plain,
Except as Fancy leads us to the place?

Think—for a moment think—a single breath,
A tiny, subtile, fleeting breath alone
Is all that stands between us here and Death!

From the high summit of my early dreams
Might I look down upon myself to-day,
Mine eyes should fail, so faint Hope's beacon gleams.

Man's egotism 's such, his ego swells
To the conceit that he is one with Him
Who made the world where he, the pigmy, dwells!

How from his seat upon the eons, Time
  Smiles at the eager haste of puny man
To end his little chores of Love and Crime!

Might I look in upon my neighbor's heart,
  Where, crouching, hidden, lurks his secret past,
I'd scarce see aught at which mine own should start.

Why should the world accord its praise alone
  To him within whose heart Chance drops the key
That liberates the song locked in its own?

Left to the mercy of his chief desires,
  Man scarce would pause short of the bestial plain,
Except as failed the fuel feeds his fires.

No stream so deep, there is no shallow shoal;
  No chain so strong, there is no faulty link;
No love but yields illicit thoughts some toll.

The Rib from which Almighty woman made
  Chanced not, methinks, to be of common clay,
But dust from whence some sweetest rose decayed!

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